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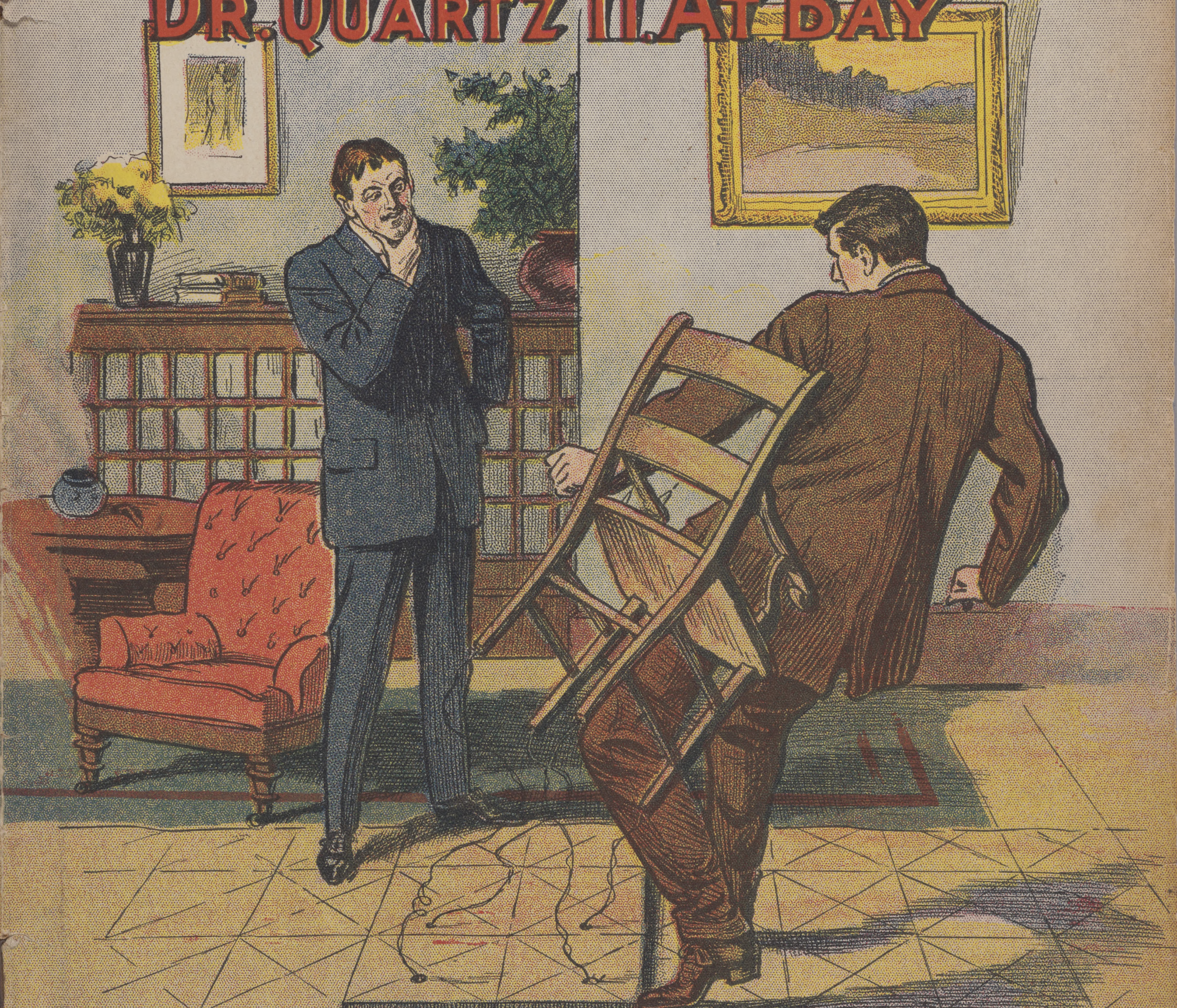
NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

DR. QUARTZ II. AT BAY



STREET & SMITH,
PUBLISHERS,
NEW YORK.

AS NICK SPRANG TO HIS FEET THE CHAIR LEAPED TOWARD HIM AND SHARP SPIKES PIERCED HIS FLESH.

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

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DOCTOR QUARTZ II. AT BAY;*

Or, Nick Carter's Conflict With Iron Nerve.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A CRIMINAL FOR CRIME'S SAKE.

Nick Carter and the chief of police of Kansas City were facing each other across the big table desk in the private office at headquarters.

"Mr. Carter," said the chief, lighting a cigar and leaning back in his chair while he slowly elevated his feet to the edge of a couch near him, "the mayor has given me directions to engage your services in this matter of the freight-car murders. I don't suppose you will hesitate to undertake the case, will you?"

"Not at all, sir. To tell you the truth, I want the case."

"Oho! You do, eh? Well, that is pleasant news. It is also unusual."

"Well, it is true, at least. The fact is, this chap who calls himself Doctor Quartz, the Second, interests me more than I can say. I will give you my word, chief, that the fellow even looks the part he is playing."

"Really?"

"Yes. In appearance he is precisely what the original Doctor Quartz was, ten years ago."

"Perhaps he is a son of Doctor Quartz."

"No; he is not young enough for that."

"He might be a younger brother."

"I have thought of that; but——"

"You don't think so, eh?"

"No; and yet, after all, it is more than likely that he is. However, I cannot imagine one brother so closely resembling another unless they happen to be twins."

"Then, why not twins? They may have been that."

"No. This fellow is not old enough. If Doctor Quartz were alive, he would be fifty years old now. This man is not yet forty, if I am any judge of the matter."

"Then how do you account for the resemblance?"

"I don't account for it at all—yet; but I will do so later on."

"The resemblance is not the only point of similarity between them, is it?"

"It is the least of all."

"Tell me something about the original Doctor Quartz," said the chief.

"Tell you something about him? My dear chief, a book as big as Blaine's 'Twenty Years In Congress' would not be half big enough to tell you about that man."

"He must have been a Jim Dandy, eh?"

"He was the handsomest man I ever saw—and the wickedest. He was at once the gentlest mannered, and the most cruel; he had the softest and most musical voice you ever heard, and it could be the harshest and coldest you could imagine. His smile was the smile of a saint, but it emanated from the soul of a devil incarnate. His hands were as soft as velvet, but they were as inflexible as bands of steel when he chose to make them so. His motions were slow and methodical, but he could move as quick as a tiger cat, and as fiercely. His muscular strength was as great as mine; indeed, I have sometimes thought it was greater. He was the most profoundly learned man I ever knew in any walk of life, for he seemed to speak every language with equal fluency, to be a past master of every science, and to have acquired with thoroughness every branch of human knowledge. He was the most skillful surgeon of his time, and the most learned physician. I never knew from whence he came. He was a mystery when he appeared on the scenes in which I took a prominent part, and he was just as great a mystery when he died. He laughed at prison walls, and at prison officials; he even laughed at me, although I succeeded in laughing last."

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*Reprinted by Request.

"You have a habit of doing that, Carter."

"Aye; but have I succeeded in doing it, in his case? I thought so until now; but now——"

"Well, what now?"

"Here is this new character which crops up when it is least expected."

"What has that got to do with the original case?"

"This: If I were superstitious—if I were not wise enough to know that it is impossible, I should think in the present case that Doctor Quartz had come to life again. I should suppose that he had risen from the grave. I should believe that he did not die, when I thought he did, for this man, with whom we have to do now, is, to all intent and purpose, Doctor Quartz."

"But he can't be the same; you have just said that."

"I know he cannot be the same; and yet he is the same."

"Nonsense, Carter!"

"I know it is nonsense. I know that this is not the same man; but I also know—or, at least, I think I know—that so far as you and I and the world at large are concerned, we are face to face with the same character; that is, with the same conditions."

"You are too deep for me, Carter."

"I mean, in a word, that we have here a man who, to begin with, looks precisely like Doctor Quartz; who possesses the same character; who is versed in the same sciences; who has the same smooth and oily manner; who is as competent, as talented, as wicked, as unrelenting, as implacable, as adroit, as skillful, and as daring. We are confronted by the same conditions."

He paused a moment, and then continued:

"But there is even more than that, chief. This man seems to glory in the fact that he is—if I may make use of the term—a replica of Doctor Quartz. He boldly places a sign on the fanlight over his door, and that sign reads, 'Doctor J. B. Quartz.'"

"Were those the initials of the original?"

"Yes; but wait."

"Go on."

"He begins his career—I refer to his police record—exactly as his predecessor did; by undertaking, through a lot of unnecessary trouble and expense, to call the attention of the police to his crimes. His predecessor fitted up an upright piano box like a woman's boudoir, and traveled inside of it, in company with one of his victims, three thousand miles by freight. This man fits up an entire freight car so that it will compare favorably with a Pullman, and it is certain that he spent not less than ten thousand dollars for his little joke—if it is a joke from his point of view.

"We know already that he purchased the running gear of an old car and made the rest of it over to suit his purposes; we know that he spared no pains or expense in the appointment and decoration of his car; we know that he murdered——"

"Hold on a minute, Nick. That is the very point; we don't know that he murdered anybody."

"We don't know it officially; but we are morally certain of it."

"You are. I am not."

"Very well; have it that way, then. I will say that I believed he murdered five persons—three women and two men—in order to carry out his plans."

"Well, go ahead from that point."

"Having murdered them, he embalmed them with a skill which would put the ancient Egyptians to the blush; and then, with their dead bodies, he arranged a scene inside that car which would have done credit to the proprietor of an Eden Musée. Nothing could have been more lifelike than the spectacle of those four corpses, seated at the table as if they were engaged in a game of cards, while the murdered girl was stretched on the bed under a sheet, with a dagger through her heart."

"I'll grant you that. It was horrible."

"Well, my dear chief, it had a point—a point which is not yet clear to us. In fact, it had several points."

"What were they, as you make them out?"

"We must go back to the arrival of the car in Kansas City to determine that."

"Very good. What, then?"

"He shipped the car to Kansas City, and purposely left it standing in the freight yard until the authorities were forced to take some action regarding it; hence, he wished the authorities to see it, and its contents."

"Well?"

"He accomplished two purposes in that."

"How so?"

"He called the attention of the authorities to his own existence—that is, to the existence of a person who was not afraid to defy them, and he delivered a message, by the hands of those dead card players, to certain people for whom it was intended."

"All that sort of reasoning seems like folly to me, Carter."

"I suppose it does. It would seem the same to me if I had not known the other Doctor Quartz; but, knowing him as I did, I understand this one."

"Explain."

"Chief, there was never a human being born into the world who did not have his weak point. The original Doctor Quartz had his, and it was that one point of weakness which finally compelled his defeat. If he had not possessed it, he would be alive to-day, and would have been able to snap his fingers at all the police forces of the world to the day of his natural death."

"Humph! What was his weak point?"

"Egotism—conceit—unlimited belief in himself. Call it what you will."

"And you think this man has this weakness?"

"The freight car proves it."

"I don't see how."

"It was his conceit which built that car. He likes to do things subtly, deftly—differently from other men."

"Well, even so, I don't see——"

Nick shrugged his shoulders.

"Let us say that this man, who calls himself Doctor Quartz, the Second, has run the entire gamut of crime without once being suspected a criminal. Let us say that he has stolen right and left, and murdered right and left, and that the eye of suspicion has not once been turned in his direction. Let us say that he has tired of all that; that there is no spice left in the commission of crime for him, for the reason that there is no danger in it. That is the way the other man, the original Doctor Quartz, would have felt. His impulses were wicked; he loved crime for crime's sake, and he loved danger for danger's sake. He murdered because he loved to kill, while at the same time he proved to the police that he could do so with impunity. He could thrust the point of a poisoned pin into the arm or leg of an unoffending man or woman in a crowd, and an hour later, or three hours later, as he chose, that man or woman would drop dead. Doctor Quartz was never suspected. He could murder an entire family while attending them as their medical adviser, and it would be discovered later on that he had so won the confidence and love of that family that he had been made the heir to all their wealth—and yet he was so skillful that he was never suspected of the crimes.

"He grew tired of that. He amassed a huge fortune, and he could have gathered in more in the same way; but there was no spice in it.

"He desired danger. He wished to defy the police; to defy mankind, because he believed himself to be so much smarter than all other men combined. He wished to be suspected. He wanted to be pursued. He longed for the conditions which would point at him as the greatest criminal on earth, and yet to so hedge himself about with safeguards that while everybody should be morally certain that he was the greatest criminal unhung, he could laugh in the faces of the men who pursued him, and defy them, because they could prove nothing against him.

"That was why he created the piano-box mystery. It was his egotism which compelled him to it. That is why this man has built and furnished the freight car as he did. It was his egotism which compelled him to it."

"I confess that I cannot understand that sort of a character."

"Nor could I—then. I do now, however. Having had to do with one, I know how to recognize the next one when I come in contact with it."

"But, man alive, why should a criminal who is practically immune from arrest, according to your theory, deliberately invite suspicion, arrest, and conviction?"

"Because he is Doctor Quartz."

The chief shrugged his shoulders.

"Let me tell you one thing," said Nick: "You have set Quartz at liberty because you had no evidence on which to hold him; and now, I'd bet my reputation that he is laughing at you. But more: while he is laughing, he is preparing the way for another crime which will throw this one so deeply into the shade that you will forget it ever happened. Quartz has only introduced himself. Wait for his next move, chief."

CHAPTER II.

A MYSTERY OF METHODS.

"Well," said the chief, after a pause, "let us get down to the facts of the present case, and let the original Doctor Quartz rest for a time, at least."

"Gladly. It is the present case with which we have to do; not the old one. And yet, if it were not for the old case—if it were not for the experience I had in that one, or, rather, in the several cases which grew out of it, I should be much more in the dark in the present matter than I think I am."

"Let me see," said the chief musingly. "I will run over the facts as we know them, just for the sake of refreshing our memories."

"A good idea."

"Your first knowledge of this case came through the museum owner, Jeremy Stone, did it not, Mr. Carter?"

"Yes. He sent for me to come here from New York."

"I have never understood just why he sent for you. Will you tell me that?"

"It was purely a matter of business with him. I will have to refer again to the old case in order to make you understand."

"Well?"

"In that case, the piano box was sent by express. The box had been kept a year unclaimed. Jeremy Stone attended the sale, and bought the box. When he opened it, he found that, instead of containing a piano, it had been fitted up to represent a diminutive boudoir, fit for the use of any lady; in fact, that it had been made double and weighted with lead to the exact weight of a piano. He had purchased the thing by accident, but, being a museum owner, he at once saw the possibilities of the box as an exhibit in his museum, provided he could ascertain the history of the box.

"That is why he sent for me; and his sending for me resulted in the unearthing of Doctor Quartz. If it had not been for the progressive advertising spirit in Jeremy Stone, the world might never have heard of Doctor Quartz—certainly not at that time.

"Now, in the present case, Stone saw in the freight car the same sort of possibilities that existed in the piano box. He determined to purchase the car, but in this case he proposed to make a mystery of it from the start. He made a great deal of money out of the piano box, and he believed that he saw a way to make still more out of the freight car; hence he sent for me. But there was still another reason."

"What was that?"

"You will remember that the car was billed to a person—possibly fictitious—called Z. T. Rauk. Now, if you will spell Z. T. Rauk backward, you will discover that if it does not spell Quartz, it certainly does not spell anything else. Substitute a Q for the K, and you have Quartz."

"That's a fact."

"Well, Jeremy discovered that, so he sent for me; but he did still more. He sent out letters of inquiry, and discovered that the car had no owner. The company had not thought it worth while to go to that trouble, but Jeremy did.

"I came to Kansas City at his solicitation. He met me at the train and told me about the car. I brought two of my assistants here with me, but I have kept them entirely in the dark so far, so that nobody, aside from yourself now, has any idea that they are here.

"I went to the freight yards and saw the foreman there, and I discovered from my talk with him that there were several persons in the city who had manifested interest in the car. Among those were two men, who are still under surveillance—and the two women I found at the house of Doctor Quartz when I went there to arrest him."

"And those women were dazed and only half conscious when we brought them to their senses at the police station," said the chief.

"Exactly. They knew nothing whatever about the matter which we could nail."

"And yet, Quartz made a direct charge against them when you arrested him, did he not?"

"Certainly. That was a part of his game."

"How a part of his game?"

"Why, in this way: He had no idea of having the affair connected with himself quite so soon. Having those women in his house at the time I went there was merely a part of his own personal plot, the secret of which we do not yet know. It was on the spur of the moment that he decided to make the charge against them. It was an accident that they were there when I went to arrest him, and it was only an evidence of his dare-devil nature that he made the charge against them at the moment."

"Your reasoning may be all right, Carter, but it is altogether too far-fetched for me."

"Chief, those women are associated in some manner with the crimes, but just how I do not know. That is one of the things I have got to find out. My assistant, Patsy, has been on their track since you let them go. I will know more about them before long. I have not a doubt, however, that they are victims of the machinations of Doctor Quartz, and that they were driven to investigating the car through fear."

"Fear of what?"

"That is what I don't know—yet."

"Well, let us hark back again for a moment. When the car was purchased by Stone, he had it taken to his museum, did he not?"

"Yes."

"And you entered the car while it stood there that night, waiting for me and others to go to it and examine it the following morning."

"Precisely."

"We will touch on that point again presently. The one I wish to make just now, is that somebody hired a lot of city thugs to blow the car and the museum, too, for that matter, sky high, that night."

"Yes."

"Well, the supposition is that it was the women who did that hiring, isn't it?"

"That was Doctor Quartz's charge; but we know it to be false, don't we?"

"From the standpoint of a policeman I should say that those women had no more to do with the proposed blowing up of the car while it was at the museum, than you or I had."

"Certainly not."

"Absolutely the only points you had against them were that they appeared to manifest some interest in the car while it was at the freight yards, and that Doctor Quartz made the assertion that they were concerned in it."

"Exactly."

"You and I both know that we cannot convict—that we cannot even hold people on such flimsy evidence as that."

"Certainly not."

"There was absolutely nothing at all against either of those women, Edith Peyton and her maid."

"Nothing whatever."

"We will return to them presently. Let us now go back to the car, for that is the point of issue."

"Certainly."

"Tell me about your entrance to the car, while you and Jeremy Stone were alone with it in the museum."

"There is nothing to tell more than you already know."

"Never mind that. Let's go over it together."

"Well, I found a secret door at one end of the car by which I entered it."

"Yes. Go on."

"I found four perfectly embalmed figures, two men and two women who had been wired in the positions they occupied at a card table inside the car. There was another embalmed body on the bed. The four at the table were of middle age; the one on the bed was a young woman, not more than twenty, if that. She had been stabbed through the heart after she was dead, and the dagger with which she was stabbed was still where the murderer had placed it."

"And there is not a doctor in the city who has been able to tell how any of the five persons in that car were killed."

"No; the embalming fluid, whatever it was, had destroyed all evidence of the poison used."

"But all the doctors agreed that they had been poisoned originally."

"Yes."

"Well, Mr. Carter, all that the police can see in that circumstance, is that five murders have been committed, and that the murderer took that strange method to ship the bodies of his victims out of the city where the crimes were committed, to Kansas City. But I understand that you see much more than that."

"Why, yes; I see the methods of Doctor Quartz."

"And that, according to your ideas, indicates a romance."

"Precisely."

"That is what I wish you to tell me about."

"I am afraid, chief, that you won't have much confidence in it."

"Never mind. Let me hear it."

"Well, we will begin at the creation of the car."

"Very good."

"If you recall the construction of the car, you will remember that not only was the door at the end, as I have described, but also that there were means of ventilation at the sides, with screens arranged so that a person traveling in it could have plenty of air as well as an opportunity to view the scenery in passing."

"Yes."

"Has it occurred to you that a man in constructing that car for the purpose of shipping dead bodies inside it, would not have arranged for entrance and egress, and also for ventilation?"

"By Jove! That's so."

"Doesn't that suggest that the original purpose of the car was for live people to travel in it?"

"It certainly does."

"Hence, you see that the car was not ultimately used for the purposes for which it was constructed. The car, in other words, was not built for the shipment of those dead bodies, but for the accommodation of live men and women."

"I see your point."

"Inside, it was so divided by heavy curtains that it could easily be made into three separate compartments."

"Yes; I remember that."

"So, we will say that it was intended for a party of six—two in each compartment; but so arranged that the three compartments could be thrown into one during the day."

"Precisely."

"Now, one of the favorite pastimes of the original Doctor Quartz was to marry heiresses. He always selected a rich, as well as a beautiful, wife. His piano-box expedition was a case in point. As soon as he had made himself the possessor of the girl's fortune—and he frequently had to murder the entire family to do that—he quietly killed her and then looked about him for another wife and another victim."

"What a fiend he was!"

"I conjecture this case to be one in which the present

Doctor Quartz has attempted to emulate his predecessor. He found his intended victim, and he built the car, we will say, for the accommodation of the bridal party, which was to consist, we will suppose, of his bride and himself, and the four persons whose bodies we found in the car."

"But——"

"Wait. Something happened to interrupt his plans. At the last moment his bride went back on him. She refused to be a party to the wedding, or her friends discovered who and what he was, and refused to permit her to fulfill her contract. We will say that the car was completed and ready when the plans fell through; so the doctor worked out a most diabolical revenge against them. He merely transformed the car from a bridal to a funeral car. There you are."

"But where is the motive for shipping it here? Why should he send it to the city where he lives and has his office and practice? Why should he, after committing five murders, deliberately put the police on his own trail? Why should he arrange so that everything would point directly at him, and then, in effect, pose before us, and virtually say: 'Here I am! Come and take me?' "

CHAPTER III.

ALWAYS ON GUARD.

"My dear chief," replied Nick, to the last question, "if we could answer all such puzzles at the time they arise, there would be no need for detectives. We are face to face with a mystery which is so complex, that the moment we think we have discovered a possible solution we encounter an obstacle which puts us entirely at sea again."

"I should say we did!"

"Fact one: A car containing five dead bodies is shipped to Kansas City, and is opened there in the presence of the authorities."

The chief nodded.

"Fact two: The bodies are found to be so perfectly embalmed, that the method of accomplishing the result is unknown to science, for there is not an undertaker, or a doctor, who can give us any information on the subject."

"Not one."

"Fact three: Circumstances point to the association of certain names with the crimes. Those names are, Doctor Quartz, Edith Peyton, and her maid, Susan Cummings. There are two other men whose names we do not know, but who evidently had no connection with the crime itself, and were merely tools of some other person—probably Doctor Quartz—after the arrival of the car in Kansas City."

"Well?"

"Fact four: There is nowhere discovered a scrap of information which will afford us any clew to the identity of the five bodies in the freight car. The car came from Philadelphia, but it is evident that the murdered men and women did not belong there."

"Quite so; nor the car, either. The police of Philadelphia can give no information whatever."

"Fact five: Of the three names which circumstances have associated with the crimes, there is absolutely no evidence whatever against any of them. Doctor Quartz readily proves an alibi to offset everything you attempt to prove against him, and pleasantly laughs at you. Edith Peyton and her maid are in the same category, with the additional fact that they are either both of weak minds, or are still under the influence of a drug which has been administered to them to keep them silent. If Edith Peyton does not really forget, or is not really ignorant, she plays the part so well that we can do nothing with her."

"Correct. And the maid also."

"Fact six: This is an accumulation of detail, as follows: The corpses have no identity; the car has no owner; the motive for the murders is a mystery; the instrument of death is unknown in each case; Doctor Quartz, so far as we know, is an estimable gentleman; the two women, so far as we know, were as ignorant of the contents of the car as you and I were; and there is absolutely nothing for us to go by in unraveling the mystery, save the car itself, and what it contained."

"Now you are talking something I can understand."

"You mean, something which neither of us understand. Now, against these six facts, I have taken the following steps: I have telegraphed my assistant, Chick, to take up the car end of it. He is now in Philadelphia, tracing the car from that point, backward, and I shall, myself, take up the task of working out the identities of the murdered persons. So much for fact one. For fact two, Doctor Wentworth, the great toxicologist and chemical expert, arrived here last night and is now attempting to solve the mystery connected with the embalming of the bodies."

"What do you expect to accomplish by that?"

"Merely to add a nail to the future coffin of Doctor Quartz, as you will see. If he is as great a scientist as his predecessor, I will get evidence against him through that mysterious embalming fluid."

"What about fact three?"

"Under that head, I shall take the trail of Doctor Quartz myself; I think that will work in very well with my investigation of the identity of the murdered persons. Also, I have put one of my cleverest assistants—Ten-Ichi—on the track of Edith Peyton and her maid; and Patsy is working with the burglar, big Jim Gleason, who tried to blow up the car, to discover the real connection with this case of the two unknown men who went to the freight yards to see the car."

"Fact four is already covered by yourself."

"Yes."

"And Ten-Ichi will soon, you believe, be able to tell you all about fact five?"

"I do believe it; yes."

"And for fact six? You have already covered that ground also?"

"Follow it with your eye while I go over it again: I shall discover the identity of the bodies before I am in position to go on with the case understandingly; Chick will do the same service by the car, and will trace it to its owner; the motive for the murders will be revealed when the identity of the murdered persons is known; how they were killed, will develop in the natural course of events; if Doctor Quartz is an estimable gentleman, I shall find it out, and if he is not, I shall know it; Ten-Ichi will, within a week, know exactly what association Edith Peyton and her maid may have, or have had, with Doctor Quartz and with the car. There you are."

"H'm! Well, all that sounds reasonable. I can understand it much better than I can all that stuff about theorizing on what Doctor Quartz's egotism will do, and his plans for revenge. Now, about your pay for this case, Carter. The mayor——"

"I will send in my bill when I have finished."

"Exactly. That is just what I was about to suggest. The mayor does not care to have any rewards offered. In fact, he agrees with me that the best thing is to keep the whole matter as quiet as possible."

Nick smiled broadly.

"Quiet or noisy, it doesn't matter to me now," he said. "I have no objection to having it known from one ocean to the other that I am on this case. Usually I prefer to work on the quiet, but just now, I much prefer to have Doctor Quartz know that Nick Carter is after him. In fact, I shall take pains to inform him of the fact myself."

"You will? When, and how?"

"This very evening, and by going to his house and telling him of it."

"Do you mean to say that you will accuse him to his face?"

"Something very like it," smiled Nick; "although I shall not exactly do it in words."

"But you intend to go to his house."

"I do. I wish to study the man."

"Look out, Carter. He may select you for the next bit of merchandise he wishes to send across the continent by freight, or express."

"I only wish he would. I think I'd fool him. That was the game his predecessor played—and lost. The fact is, chief, I have already got a little evidence against Quartz, which I have not told you about."

"What is it?"

The detective took from one of his pockets a small velvet case which had once contained a lady's watch, and passed it to the chief.

"Look at that," he said.

"What of it?" asked the chief. "It looks like a watch case."

"It is. Open it."

The chief pressed the spring and the cover flew back, disclosing the fact that the circular bed in which a gold watch had once reposed was now filled with white wax, and that the wax had received an impression of some sort upon its surface.

"What about it?" asked the chief.

"Do you remember," asked Nick, "that when I searched the freight car in which the bodies came here, the only thing I discovered which was not put there purposely for you, or me, or somebody to find, was the imprint of several dirty fingers against the velvet plush near the secret door?"

"Yes."

"The imprint of one of those fingers—the first finger of the left hand—is very plain. I had it photographed, and then had the negative intensified and enlarged."

"Well?"

"I have put the wax in that case for the purpose of asking Doctor Quartz to give me, of his own free will, an impression of the first finger of his left hand."

"But there is already an impression here."

"That was made by my own finger. I put it there merely to show the doctor what a perfect impression the wax would produce."

"But he will refuse, likely."

"Chief, I don't care a rap whether he consents or refuses. What I want to see is the expression of his face when I ask him the question."

"What do you expect to gain by that?"

"Merely one glance at the man's thoughts. The suggestion will be a surprise to him. Men like Doctor Quartz are forever on their guard. The one thing to do with characters like his is to catch them off their guard. That is next to an impossible feat. If you wished to throw a stone through a certain window into a house, and you knew that window to be always barred with iron shutters, you would regard the feat as rather impossible, wouldn't you?"

"I should say so."

"But if you could devise some means whereby you could force the person on guard inside that window to open it for the purpose of looking out for an instant, then if you stood by, with a stone ready to hurl, you would stand a fairly good chance of succeeding, eh?"

"Sure."

"Well, Doctor Quartz's exterior is just such a window. He never opens it when there is a person near enough to him to see through it. In other words, he is always on his guard."

"And you propose, by this suggestion, to throw him off his guard for an instant."

"I think I can—provided he has not given the subject some thought. You see, he does not know that those finger marks are on the velvet near the door of the car."

"Why are you sure of that?"

"Because if he had known he made them he would have removed them. Not having removed them, he does not know they are there."

"He may have found out since that they are there."

"In that case, he will be on his guard, and I will not get the shutters open for me to see through; but I don't think he knows they are there. I think I will have a glimpse of the inside."

"When are you going there?"

"At once; when I leave you."

"Well, I hope you will get a look through that window. When will I see you again, Carter?"

"When I can tell you the true story of the mystery of the five murders."

CHAPTER IV.

THE DEFIANCE OF DOCTOR QUARTZ.

When Nick Carter rang the bell of Doctor Quartz's residence, and the door was opened by a servant in livery, the detective gave his own personal card to be delivered to the mysterious man upon whom he had called.

That card was engraved plainly with his own name, and, therefore, Doctor Quartz would know at once that the detective had determined to seek his interview boldly, and without any sort of subterfuge.

He was shown into the reception room, and presently the doctor came to him there.

He paused just inside the doorway and regarded his caller with an expression which was difficult to define; still there was a smile on his face; but whether it was one of welcome or of derision, or what it might portend, Nick could not determine.

"I scarcely hoped that you would do me so great an honor, Mr. Carter," said the doctor, in that strangely melodious voice which he could render as soft as the purring of a cat. "To what circumstance am I indebted for this call?"

He came on into the room while he was speaking, and motioned to Nick to resume the chair he had vacated upon the doctor's entrance.

"My call is due to a very natural desire on my part," replied Nick, "to ask you a few questions which I think you will not hesitate to answer."

"We can better determine that when I have listened to the questions you wish to ask," said the doctor, still smiling.

"Assuredly. You have announced yourself, I believe, as Doctor Quartz, the Second."

"Not at all. I have never done so. You are entirely mistaken."

"Indeed!"

"I know, of course, that there was once a certain Doctor Quartz; but there might also have been a dozen of them for all I know to the contrary. The qualifying title—'The Second'—has been given to me by others."

"Still you know to whom I refer as your predecessor?"

"Certainly."

"Did you ever know the man himself?"

"Certainly."

"Were you related?"

"He was my brother—ten years older than I."

"Thank you for being so explicit. Will you tell me how it happens that your initials are the same as his were?"

"His first name was John—or Jack, as he was familiarly called. My first name is James. Our middle initials were likewise the same. Do you care to be made acquainted with my ancestry?"

The studied insolence of the question brought a smile to the face of the detective; but he replied as coolly:

"It would give me a great deal of pleasure to know who your fathers were before you."

"So sorry that I do not feel called upon to accommodate you with the information, sir. Unless I am greatly mistaken you had ample opportunity to obtain those facts from my brother. Doubtless you asked him the same question in the past."

"Often," replied Nick.

"The last time you called here," said the doctor, narrowing his eyes a little, and sharpening them so that they seemed like two narrow points which were reading the soul of the detective—if it had happened that Nick's soul could be so easily read—"you came here to arrest me on an entirely foolish charge, and in order to make you appear still more ridiculous, I played a little joke on you."

"You refer, I suppose, to your own charge against the two women whom I found here at that time," said Nick.

"Yes."

"One of my reasons for coming here this evening was to ask you to explain that joke."

"Was it, indeed? Were you so dense that you could not see through it?"

"I must confess that I was."

"How shall I make you understand? Let me see."

The doctor dropped his chin upon one of his hands, and appeared to be lost in thought, but the detective could see that he was smiling.

Presently, with an appearance of frankness which Nick knew was assumed, he raised his head again, and with that same enigmatical smile on his lips, said:

"I think we were all more or less interested in the mysterious freight car, were we not?"

"It would appear so," replied Nick, "although you have not made public any interest you might have felt in it."

"Let us say that I was interested, then, and let it go at that."

"Very well—for the present."

"I think, Mr. Carter, that I will have to deviate from the direct subject for a moment, in order to make you understand."

"Take any course you please, doctor. I am a creature of extraordinary patience."

"So I have been informed. Very well. You must know, to begin with, that while you have been unaware of my existence, I have been quite familiar with yours."

"Indeed? You surprise me!"

"I will surprise you still more before I am through."

"I like to be surprised—pleasantly, at least."

"You are enough of a student, Mr. Carter, to understand that when a man wishes to master any given subject, he devotes a certain amount of study to that subject, the amount depending upon two things, one of which is the difficulty of the subject itself, and the other his own personal interest in the subject."

"Yes."

"I have devoted something approximating ten years to studying you."

"I certainly should feel greatly honored by so much attention."

"That is according to how you take it," replied the doctor coolly.

"May I ask whether it was the difficulty of the subject, or your interest in it which induced you to devote so much time to me?"

"Both."

"And might I inquire into the result of your studies?"

Doctor Quartz left his chair and crossed the room. From a table he took a globe map of the world, and then, returning until he stood directly in front of the detective, he held the globe poised in one hand while with the other he pointed at it.

"If I desire to learn thoroughly the geography of the world, so that I would be as familiar with every portion of it as I am with the neighborhood in which I was born, I would begin with a map something like this. After mastering the rudiments of this, I would take up each section by itself, by countries. Later, I would divide the countries themselves into sections. These I would again subdivide, and so on, *ad infinitum*. Do you understand? In the end, I would have mastered every detail so that I could tell you as much about the known information of Tibet, for example, as you could tell me about—er—police headquarters in the city of New York."

"I see your point. What of it?"

"That is something like the method I have employed in studying you."

"But why have you studied me at all?"

"Because, Mr. Detective Carter, you succeeded in destroying a person whom I considered the best-informed, smartest, and most intelligent man in the world."

"You refer to your distinguished predecessor, I suppose."

"I do. In the long warfare between you, you finally won. In the warfare between you and me, you will finally lose."

"Ah!" said Nick. "Then you admit that it is to be war between us."

"No, I do not admit it; I announce it."

"That fact will doubtless save both of us a lot of trouble."

"Oh, I don't know. It may possibly save you some trouble and anxiety. I had not considered you in the matter. I am glad you came here to-night, for if you had not selected to come to me, I should have gone to you."

"You might have experienced some difficulty in finding me, doctor."

"Not at all. I know every move you make, and have known them for years past. Don't forget that I have already told you of my study of you and your methods."

Nick shrugged his shoulders. There was something so coldly menacing in the attitude of the doctor, that the detective felt that the man was not boasting; and he was curious to know just how far he would go in his assumed frankness.

But he was soon to discover, and to realize that Doctor Quartz was not deceiving him when he boasted of his knowledge of the detective.

"I should have sought you for the purpose of telling you a few things you do not know—for, little as you may realize the fact, there are still some things in the world with which you are not familiar," continued the doctor.

"For instance?" said Nick.

"For instance, you do not use a disguise with which I am not familiar, and you could not adopt a new one which I would not penetrate the moment I saw you. You have not made a move in the pursuit of your profession, for the past four or five years, with which I have not been in touch from the beginning to the end. I have merely looked on from a distance, to see not only what you would do, but how you would do it. You are an open book to me, Carter."

"How pleasant!"

"I knew when you received the letter from Jeremy Stone, calling you here, and I also knew the contents of the letter. I knew exactly when you started for Kansas City and what train you took to come here. I knew when you arrived, and also that two of your assistants were on the train with you. I knew that they left the car at the opposite end. I knew of the conversation between you and Stone at that time. I know that you went to the freight yards to talk with the foreman there, one William Durland by name. I know where you took up your quarters, although you attempted to be very secret about it."

"You do seem to have been unusually well posted about my actions," replied Nick, with a shrug; "still, you must admit that all you have told me could easily have been acquired by you since it happened, and not so easily before it happened, when it would have been of more benefit to you."

"I know," continued the doctor, as if he had not heard Nick's remark, "that you have been in consultation with the chief of police to-day, and that you have told him of your intention to come here. I know that your assistants, Ten-Ichi and Patsy, are in the city now, and that each has his orders; I also know what those orders are. I know, furthermore, what your other assistant, Chick, is doing, and—— But what is the use of telling you all this? I know every move you make, often before you make it. Look at me, Mr. Carter."

"I am looking at you, doctor."

"I have told you that I am the brother of the Doctor Quartz whom you once knew. Perhaps that is true—and, perhaps I am the same man, come to life again to be your undoing."

Nick laughed outright.

"You don't expect me to believe that, of course," he said.

"I don't expect you to believe anything; I don't care whether you believe or not. You have in your pocket at this moment a red velvet watch case containing wax upon which you wish me to give you the impression of one of the fingers of my left hand. Give me the case and I will accommodate you. Does it surprise you that I know that?"

"Yes, it does," replied Nick truthfully.

"You expected to catch me off my guard when you asked me to give you that impression, but, you see, I am informed in advance of your intention. I have not waited and studied for ten years, to arrive at the pleasure of this moment, for nothing, Mr. Carter."

"So I perceive."

"You do not require the impression of my finger on that wax, for I am perfectly willing to tell you that it was my finger which made the mark on the plush near the door of the freight car. We are alone, Carter, and I can tell you anything I please, and you cannot use it against me for the good reason that you can prove nothing. If you choose to go away and repeat what I have told you, I will simply deny that such a conversation has taken place. My statement is quite as good as yours before a jury, or before a court. You know that. You will always require proof, in order to convict, and that proof you cannot procure. You see, Carter, that I defy you. I have committed enough crimes to be hung a hundred times—enough to sit in all the electric chairs that were ever made—enough to spend a hundred years in prison—enough to make the records of the world's greatest criminals fall into obscurity; but you cannot prove one of them, Carter; now, or ever. That is why I have chosen to be frank with you—and to defy you."

CHAPTER V.

THE VICTIM OF A CRUEL DEVICE.

"May I smoke?" asked Nick, leaning back in his chair and taking a cigar from his pocket.

"Certainly. Will you have one of my cigars?"

"No, thank you. I smoked one of your predecessor's cigars once, and I did not wake up again for several hours. I have more confidence in my own."

Doctor Quartz smiled.

"Do you suppose, Carter," he said, "that if I cared to render you unconscious, I could not have done so without moving from this chair, or resorting to anything so ancient as giving you a drugged cigar?"

"I think you would have found it somewhat difficult," replied Nick.

"Let me prove to you how easily I could accomplish it. Oblige me by leaving your chair for a moment. Do not hesitate, for I assure you that I will not move from where I am seated. I merely wish to convince you."

Nick left the chair in which he was seated, and stood upon his feet.

"Now," said the doctor, "you remember, do you not, that while you were seated here, your arm was resting upon the natural place for it—that is, on the arm of the chair. Placing your own arm there, served two purposes; one was, that it rested it, and the other was that it afforded you a purchase against which you could quickly and easily leap out of your chair, if I had made any belligerent move which made you think it necessary to do so. Is that correct?"

"Quite so."

"Now, if you will be good enough to examine either arm of the chair in which you were seated, you will discover that two long needles are protruding from it. Do you see them?"

"Yes, I see them."

"I have forced them from their places of concealment, simply by pressing a spring which is concealed in this chair. If I had pressed that spring while you were seated there, those needles would have pierced the flesh of your arms, and you would have been unconscious before you would have had time to draw a second breath."

Nick felt a shiver pass through him, although he gave no outward evidence of it.

"If," continued the doctor, "your arms had not been in the right position to have accommodated the needles you have seen, I could have pressed still another spring, and produced other needles, in other parts of the chair. So. Now look, and you will discover two in the seat of the chair, two more at the back of the chair, and two more where they would have pricked you in the head were you still seated there. Do you see them?"

"Yes."

"Do you appreciate the fact that I could easily have pricked you with any one of them, or with all of them, had I chosen to do so?"

"Yes."

"Very good. Those needles are tipped with the most delicate poison I know how to concoct. They are not deadly. They merely produce instant unconsciousness. You see, do you not, that if I wished to render you at my mercy, how foolish it would be to resort to the slow method of a drugged cigar?"

"Quite so."

"Be seated again, Mr. Carter. The needles have disappeared again, and I have no wish to prick you with them."

"If it is all the same to you, I will take a different chair," said Nick.

"Oh; any chair you please. This one in which I am seated, if you like."

The doctor chuckled when he made the remark, and Nick could have choked him gladly. But he drew forward another chair, turned it over to see that it was not connected with the floor, and finally seated himself upon it.

"This will serve my purpose," he said. "You were, I think, on the point of admitting some facts connected with your criminal record."

"Oh, I don't propose to give you detail, Mr. Carter. I am not so generous as that. My one desire is to convince you that you are as a baby in my hands; that I can, at any moment when I choose, brush you out of existence, as you would brush a spider from its web with a woman's broom. When the British government fortified Gibraltar, the place was meant to be impregnable, and it has proved so. When I prepared myself for this experience I am just beginning, I made just as painstaking preparations. You have been completely at my mercy for almost ten years, and you have not, until now, known of my existence. Do you suppose, after taking all that care and trouble, that I care to put you out of the way without having my fun with you? I hope I do not offend you."

"You certainly interest me."

"Do I? How pleasant! Let me see; I believe you have elected to run me down, to arrest me, and to convict me for the murders of the five persons whose dead bodies, perfectly embalmed, were found in the freight car now at the museum of Jeremy Stone; am I right?"

"You are dead right, if anybody should ask you."

"Thank you. The mayor of the city instructed the chief of police to engage your services and you have accepted the case. Am I still correct?"

"You are still correct."

"And you have informed the chief that you are positive in your own mind that the freight-car incident is entirely Quartzonian, and that I, at least, possess criminal knowledge of the facts connected with it?"

"That is correct also."

"You have sworn—or shall I say promised—to convict me of those crimes, eh?"

"Something like that; yes."

"Well, Carter, I will not say that I am guilty of the crimes you lay at my door, but I will admit that I could tell you all about the freight car, if I chose to do so. Now, with that admission from me, what are you going to do about it?"

"I am going to prove it. I am going to compel you to tell all you know, before I am done with you."

"Ah!"

The doctor rubbed his hands together in evident satisfaction. His fat face was wreathed in smiles, and his eyes sparkled with pleasure.

"That is the way to talk," he said. "Now we are getting at it. Now we understand each other. Do you know, Carter, I really thought you would be afraid to declare yourself."

"Afraid?" Nick laughed.

"Oh, I would not have blamed you had you been afraid. But, instead, you are accepting the position I wished you to assume."

"Am I, indeed? What position is that?"

"Why, of open warfare between us. We begin on even ground, don't you see?"

"How so?"

"I acknowledge myself to be the greatest criminal out of prison or unexecuted. You regard yourself as the only really great and undefeated detective in the world."

"Stow all that, Quartz, and go on with your statement."

"We meet on even ground, that is all. Have you ever watched a cat, when it has caught a mouse?"

"Often."

"If the mouse happens to be uninjured—that is, only slightly hurt—the cat takes it to an open space, and then calmly looks the other way while the mouse slowly crawls toward freedom. The cat does not appear to see the mouse until it has almost escaped, but then it leaps forward and returns the mouse to the center of the open space again; and this performance continues until the cat is tired, and generously—er—murders its victim. You have seen that, have you?"

"Frequently."

"Well, in this case, I am the cat and you are the mouse. I have caught you. I have taken you to the open space. Now, I am going to play with you. That is why I have studied you all these years. We meet on even ground, only I am much the stronger of the two because I am so much better prepared."

"You think so, no doubt."

"No; I know it."

"And yet, you have the same weak point possessed by the other Doctor Quartz."

"Not at all, Carter; not at all. You think I have; but I haven't."

Nick smiled.

"You think I have the egotism, the conceit of the other Doctor Quartz, but I assure you that you are mistaken. I possess merely the sure knowledge of my superiority. That is why I dare to acknowledge to you that I am the criminal you think me; but, my dear Carter, you will discover that I am the Gibraltar, while you are the poor fool who batters himself to pieces against the walls."

The detective still smiled and made no reply.

"Look around you, Carter; for I see that you require some further demonstration of my power, besides the needles in the chair. Do you see that open door through which you entered the room?"

"Plainly."

"It is within twelve feet of you; no?"

"About that, I should say."

"Doubtless you think that from where you are seated, you would have no difficulty in getting through that door before it could be closed. Let me see you try it."

Nick shrugged his shoulders.

"I am tired of this horseplay," he said. "Have you a spring connected with that door, as well as with the chair in which I was seated?"

"Look," replied the doctor; and as the detective looked, a pair of steel shutters that were concealed in the walls at either side of the aperture, flew together with a snap, and left the two men shut inside the room. And then, as the detective was in the act of turning again to face Doctor Quartz, they flew open again, leaving the doorway as it had been before.

"You see?" said the doctor.

"Yes; I saw," replied Nick.

"Do you think you could have reached the doorway soon enough to have passed through it before the steel shutters barred your way?"

"Perhaps not," assented the detective.

"My! How grudgingly you admit it, and yet you know it to be a fact. Carter, that door and those needles are only two among hundreds of devices I have arranged for your benefit—as well as for others', for I would not have you think that I have done you too much honor. Both the door and the needles come in quite handy for others also."

"I have not a doubt of it."

"And this house is only one of several—it is not necessary that you should know how many there are or where they are—where I could receive you with the same sort of delicate attention."

"And now," said Nick, "now that you have demonstrated something of your boasted power, and have told me so much, will you tell me why you have taken all this trouble for my entertainment?"

"Would you like to know?"

"Certainly."

"Very well, I will tell you. I have purchased a small island in the Pacific Ocean to which I mean to retire some day, and enjoy the balance of my life as suits me best; that is, among my books and instruments. In a word, in study. There I shall enjoy the delights of vivisection upon human subjects, without hindrance from the authorities, and to my heart's content. I have already stocked the place with prospective subjects, and you have no idea what a land of enchantment I shall make of it. Later, before I have done with you, I may tell you more about it; for the present, I wish to say that I intend to go there after I have done with you. But I must finish with you first.

"You see, Carter, I have promised myself that I will make you suffer a thousand pangs for every one you administered to my predecessor. I have promised myself that you shall be fooled and outwitted at every turn; that you shall first lose your reputation, then your fortune, then your friends, then your honor; I have promised myself that you shall see those whom you love best, stricken down, one by one, at your side, and that the corpses of your three assistants, and of the woman you love, shall finally find their several ways to a dime museum, as those now in the freight car have done; and that, finally, you shall yourself furnish for me the most interesting of my subjects for vivisection. You love a woman named Carmen——"

Nick leaped to his feet with an exclamation of anger, and started toward the doctor, but even as he did so the chair in which he had been seated flew upward behind him as if his act of leaving it had released some hidden spring.

It seemed to leap toward him, as if the whole chair were a concealed spring. Sharp spikes protruded from it, which pierced his flesh as they struck him, and in an instant more he sank to the floor, unconscious, and to all appearance, lifeless.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DEMON DOCTOR'S FIRST VICTIM.

When Nick Carter opened his eyes, he looked around him in amazement, for he was in his room, in the house to which he had repaired after his advent in Kansas City, and where he had taken accommodations, believing that he could preserve the secret of his location.

He attempted to rise, but fell back again, realizing that his nerves were still benumbed by the drug which had been injected into his veins through the agency of the spikes in the chair.

His own rooms were at least two miles from the house of Doctor Quartz, and he knew that he must have been brought there while he was unconscious; and then, step by step, he recalled all that had occurred in the reception room of the doctor.

"What a consummate fiend that man is!" he mused, while he waited for his strength to return to him. "I doubt if there is an article of furniture in that room which is not prepared to be used as a trap if the necessity shall arise. The mere act of sitting in that chair I last occupied must have released the mechanism, so that I was bound to be wounded as I was as soon as I should attempt to leave it.

"That man made no idle threats, either. He meant every word he said. And he has studied me almost as closely as he asserts.

"Well, why not? It would be like him—at least, it would have been exactly like the other Doctor Quartz to have done that very thing.

"Heaven! When one stops to consider what might have been accomplished by a man of such brain as he possesses, if only his intelligence were turned to a right use, it is appalling.

"But he adopts villainy for his pursuit, and he takes it up precisely as he would undertake the study of any science.

"What am I to conclude from all that he has said to me? Why, plainly, that he has really devoted ten years of his life—that is, one side of it—to studying me and my habits, while he has kept himself in the background, not permitting me even to know that he existed.

"It seems incredible that a man could do such a thing, and I should be the first to refuse to accept it as a fact if I did not understand how thoroughly Quartzonian it is.

"He has evidently taken pains to live near me, but to keep out of my sight. He doubtless is possessed of unlimited means, and has been able to keep a corps of detectives of his own through whom he has been able to observe.

"I could fancy, almost, that I can see the hand of Doctor Quartz in many of the cases I have had, as if he has engineered the villain in each case until he has grown tired of the game and permitted it to end.

"In ten years what could he not accomplish? He could get his own spies on the police of the cities he selected; he could worm his way into private offices through the employment of spies; he could have educated an army of assistants to do his bidding in any place where he wished to put them, and he could become, in the line he selected, almost omnipotent.

"And now, evidently the time has come when he is prepared to meet me, and to conquer me, as he believes, at every turn.

"And he prefers to do that openly; that is like Doctor Quartz.

"He prefers coolly to tell me that he is the guilty man, and then to defy me; that is like Doctor Quartz.

"He prefers to admit me to his parlor, and to show me a sample of his power, while he sits near by and laughs in his sleeve; that is like Doctor Quartz.

"He prefers to render me unconscious at the end of our interview, and then to return me here to my own room, uninjured, in order further to demonstrate his power; that is like Doctor Quartz.

"He prefers to tell me plainly that he is actually worse than what I think him—to almost acknowledge the five murders of the freight car—to demonstrate his ability to find out my most cherished secrets, and finally to go so far as to threaten the woman I love; all that is strikingly like Doctor Quartz.

"Why, Dazaar, the arch fiend, was a joke beside Quartz; and I wonder—aye, I wonder if, after all, even Dazaar was not merely a tool of his?

"Pshaw! What nonsense! And yet, to carry on that study of me, of which he boasts, he must have provided himself with human tools.

"One thing is certain: I cannot fight Doctor Quartz in the open. He is forewarned, and altogether too thoroughly forearmed for that. I must meet him on his own ground. Hello! I wonder what that is."

Nick had partly raised himself on the couch where he was lying, and he could see, resting on the table in the center of the room, a sheet of paper with writing on it.

"Quartz has left a letter for me, after the manner of his famous predecessor," he mused, rising, for now his nerves had regained their wonted energy, and no longer refused to do his bidding.

He felt thoroughly himself again, and so far as he could determine, there was not a vestige of the effects of the drug left about him.

He crossed the floor and took up the sheet of paper.

It was, as he had supposed, a message from Quartz.

It was written in a delicate chirography, almost as fine and perfect as copper plate, and was as follows:

"MY DEAR CARTER: You have accused me of possessing the weakness of that other person to whom we have occasion to refer, and one of them was, I believe, that of writing too many letters for your delectation. I venture to write this one, nevertheless, and you are at liberty to use it to whatever advantage you can.

"You had the misfortune to faint away while you were in my rooms, and I have done you the service to bring you to your home, where you can receive that care of which you seem to stand so much in need.

"I trust you will have entirely recovered by the time you read this, and have no doubt that you will have done so.

"I am quite well aware that you desire nothing more than that I should say something in this letter which you could make use of, but such is not my purpose. The letter is merely to assure you of my interest in your affairs, and to repeat that I will leave no stone unturned to interest myself in them.

"Some day, when I shall have completed the duties which hold me here, and have prepared the way for my continued sojourn on that island in the Pacific, of which I gave you some slight account, I hope—for a time, at least—to have the pleasure of your society and your aid in my scientific researches. I am wedded to science, my dear Carter, and the most interesting of all sciences is the study of humanity itself.

"Perhaps you will be able to read between the lines of this letter, and to extract from it, that pleasant meaning which I cannot put into so many words. I hope so. In the meantime, let me venture to hope that when you next see your good assistant, Patsy, you will remind him of my existence, and give him my remembrances.

"It is not necessary that I should sign my name, since you will know so well who penned these lines with the execrably bad pen I found on your table."

Nick laid the letter aside with a frown.

"Now, what does he mean by that reference to Patsy?" he asked himself.

He looked at his watch and then uttered an exclamation of surprise. Next, he started for the window, and looked out upon the street.

"Great Scott!" he thought. "I must have been in that unconscious state many hours. This is another day. It is all of fifteen hours or more since that chair flew over and hit me, in Doctor Quartz's office. It was about nine in the evening when I was knocked over, and it is now almost noon of the next day."

He wheeled and looked anxiously around him.

"Patsy was to meet me here at midnight, last night," he mused, "and the reference in that letter can mean but one thing—one thing. Great Heaven, has he captured Patsy, and got the lad in his power already?"

For that was how it appeared to the detective, and that was the way he read the message of Doctor Quartz as contained in the letter.

"As soon as I was unconscious, Quartz brought me here," he mused. "Then he waited for the arrival of Patsy. I can see it all now. Patsy came while he was here—while I was lying helpless upon that couch, and Quartz had no difficulty in capturing him. That is what he means when he tells me when I next see my assistant, Patsy—and all that."

The detective was now thoroughly himself again, with every sense upon the alert.

Face to face with an actual incident which demanded his attention, he gave his mind entirely to it, to the utter exclusion of all things else.

His first move was to leave the room, to run rapidly down the stairs and open the street door.

His purpose in making this move was at once obvious, for he was able to tell at a glance that Patsy had been there, and also that he had not been able to leave his mark again when he went out; and also that Ten-Ichi had not been there at all.

One of his arrangements with his assistants was for each of them to leave a sign, made by a certain chalk mark, on the steps outside the house, when they entered it, so that he could tell, without entering, if either of them were there, or had been there and gone away again.

Patsy's mark was there—a figure 12, which said as plainly as if it had been written, that he had arrived there at midnight. If he had gone out again later, and could have done so, he would have crossed out the 12, and placed beside it another figure showing the hour of his leaving. The chalk mark was red; if Ten-Ichi had made it, it would have been green.

"So Patsy came here at twelve, and he was not able to leave his mark when he went away," mused the detective. "So much I know. Now to see if the lad had an opportunity of leaving me any sign concerning what happened to him inside the house."

He hastened back to his room again.

Everything seemed to be in perfect order, although he had no doubt that Doctor Quartz had thoroughly examined everything the room contained.

For a time he looked in vain for some sort of message from the younger detective, but at last he discovered it; and when discovered, it seemed worthy of the young assistant.

The lad had evidently been bound and thrown upon the same couch where Nick awoke to consciousness, for scrawled in letters of blood against the white wall behind the couch, with bleeding finger which he had torn open on a nail in the couch covering so that he could write it, Nick found this message:

"QUARTZ HAS GOT ME."

That was all; but it was enough.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WOMAN BEHIND THE GRATING.

Just as the clocks in the city were striking twelve, and thus announcing the midnight hour, two figures raised themselves over the cornice of a house three doors removed from the one in which Doctor Quartz resided, and where Nick Carter held the interview with him which had ended so disastrously.

"So far, so good," said the voice of Nick Carter, addressing his companion. "Come on, Ten-Ichi, but be as silent as the grave."

He took the lead then, and the two glided swiftly and noiselessly across the roofs, until they paused in the shadow of a chimney which came from the Quartz residence.

"Yonder is the skylight," whispered the detective in the ear of his companion. "This is the first time in my experience that I have taken this method of entering a house, but it seemed necessary to-night."

"We are not inside the house yet," replied Ten-Ichi, in the same cautious voice.

"No; but we will get there. Come!"

He led the way to the scuttle, which was just beyond the skylight, and attempted to raise it; but it resisted his efforts.

"Fastened," he muttered. "Give me the tools, lad."

Ten-Ichi passed a small bag of tools which had been slung across his shoulders, and from this the detective extracted a brace and bit of fine workmanship. These were quickly adjusted, and in a few moments more the latter had eaten through the tin as well as the woodwork of the scuttle.

But the detective did not pause there.

Hole after hole was bored through the scuttle, and so closely together that when the detective finally desisted, and gave the tool back to his assistant, he wrenched what remained of the clinging wood loose in his grasp, and laid it silently on the roof beside him.

Next, he thrust his right arm through the opening, and, after feeling around in the darkness for a considerable time, he drew it forth again, and raised himself to his feet.

"So much is done," he whispered. "Now, Ten-Ichi, I shall raise the scuttle and go down; but I wish you to remain where you are."

"Am I not to go inside the house with you?"

"No. You are to remain here. You can serve me best in that way. There may be a thousand bells ringing inside the house at this moment, to give Doctor Quartz warning of what I have already done. If he heard them, he is waiting for me, and I don't wish him to capture both of us, although I'll give him something to do to get me this time, even if he is on the watch."

"What shall I do here?"

"Wait. Wait and see what happens."

"And if I hear a scrimmage?"

"Listen with all your ears if you hear such a thing. I will shout an order. If you hear me call out the word 'Doctor!' you are to come to my assistance. If, instead, I used the word 'Quartz!' you are to make your way to the chief of police and tell him what has happened."

"All right."

"You understand thoroughly?"

"Yes."

"And you will obey to the letter?"

"I will."

"If you hear nothing at all, wait here for an hour, and then go to the chief of police. In that case, bring him here, but by the front door, and make him rip the house inside out, if it is necessary. He will have sufficient cause in case I am not back here inside of an hour."

Nick raised the scuttle then, and slowly let himself down into the darkness.

For a moment after his feet were upon the ladder under the scuttle, he paused and whispered to Ten-Ichi.

"Remember," he said.

"I will remember," replied the assistant.

Then the detective nodded his head, and in an instant more had disappeared from view into the interior of Doctor Quartz's house.

Nick descended the ladder to the floor, and then, after waiting a moment to listen, and being assured that no alarm of his approach had been given, he produced his electric searchlight and pressed the button.

The light revealed the fact that he was in a closet which was barely large enough to accommodate the ladder, and was, in fact, a narrow shaft, created solely to lead to the roof through the scuttle.

There was a door directly in front of him, and he found upon investigation that it was securely locked.

But locks, especially of the kind that are used in ordinary doors, offered slight obstacle to him, and in a moment, by the aid of his picklock, he had it opened. Then, extinguishing his light, he passed through into the uppermost hallway of the house, and closed the door behind him.

One word now, as to how the detective succeeded in reaching the roof of the house unobserved.

He was well aware that Quartz would not be caught off his guard if he could avoid it, and the moment he knew that Patsy had been captured, and was even at that moment in imminent danger of his life at the hands of Doctor Quartz, he decided that he would beard the lion in his den, so to speak; in other words, that he would penetrate to the interior of the doctor's house in search of him.

He immediately went out and found Ten-Ichi, whom he ordered to await him that night at the end of the block where his own rooms were, and then he returned to his own apartment.

There he waited till night, well knowing that one or more of the hirelings of the wily doctor was on the watch for him, but resolved to outwit them, no matter how many there might be.

To do this he remained in his room with the gas lighted, after it was dark. He also left the shutters of the window open, so that a person outside could readily see into the interior of the room.

He had already arranged a dummy for his uses; and this, which represented himself, as well as he could make it do so, he placed in a rocking-chair, well out of sight through the window.

This done, he calmly seated himself in another chair which was in full view.

There he remained quietly reading, and now and then nodding his head, as if sleepy, and at times really appearing to go to sleep, but in reality wide awake.

At eleven o'clock he stretched his arms, yawned, and rose from the chair. Then he crossed the room until he was out of sight from the window, and dropping to the floor, seized two ropes which were connected with the chair in which he had placed the dummy.

He pulled first upon one rope and then upon the other, thus giving the chair the appearance of being hitched across the room, as a person would move it who was comfortably seated and who was too tired or too lazy to rise.

The effect was perfect.

The chair, with its contents, moved as methodically across the room to its place under the light, as if there had really been a person seated in it, and from the street he knew that it appeared as if he had fallen asleep in his chair with his book in his hands.

After that, the rest was easy.

He had only to creep from the room, taking care not to permit himself to be seen from the street, and then to make his way through the scuttle of the house to the roof; thence across the roof to the end of the block, and then down to the street by way of the water pipes, to Ten-Ichi, who was awaiting him.

He had made no effort at disguise, for the reason that he did not expect to be seen at all.

From there, he and Ten-Ichi made their way directly to the vicinity of the house where Doctor Quartz lived, thence to the roofs, and the rest we know.

But now the detective was inside the house. Nay, more; he had penetrated to the top floor through the scuttle, and before him he felt was the opportunity to unravel the mysteries of that place.

He did not wish, for reasons of caution, to make use of his light again, lest it should betray his presence there, and so he crept on cautiously, feeling with his hands along the top of the balustrade, and assisted in some degree by a faint reflection of light which sifted in through the skylight over his head.

In this way he found, one after another, the doors of the four rooms on that floor.

Each of these doors responded to his touch, and each of the rooms was vacant.

After satisfying himself of that much, he returned to the hallway and to the head of the stairs, and thence down them, to the next floor below.

Here, he realized at once that he was on different ground.

There was a light burning in the lower hall, and enough of it penetrated to the floor where he was, to enable him to see his way about, accustomed as his eyes now were to darkness.

At first, as he paused to listen, not a sound came to his ears, although he could see that there was a light in the front room of the house—he could see where it shone through the crack under the door.

As he approached it, however, he could hear the murmur of voices, although they were so indistinct that he could not even determine whether they were masculine or feminine.

He got down on his hands and knees and pressed his ear against the crack under the door, and then he felt a thrill of pleasure, for he recognized Patsy's voice on the instant—recognized it, although he could not determine a word that was uttered.

Rising, he gave a moment's examination to the door, and discovered, rather to his surprise, that it was made to open outward, instead of in, as such doors usually are hung.

He discovered also that there were bolts on the outside of the door, and with exceeding caution, lest he should alarm those inside the room—for he had no positive knowledge that Quartz himself might not be there—he shoved back the bolts and pulled the door slowly ajar.

He discovered in that instant that he was not yet inside the room by any means, for beyond the door was still another, and this one was made of iron grating as thick and heavy as that which is used in prisons.

But it was not so much the grating which arrested his attention as it was what he discovered beyond it.

He was, in fact, gazing into the interior of a room in which two persons were fastened, by chains, to the opposite walls, so that they faced each other.

One of those persons was Patsy; and the other—he could almost have sworn that she was the same young woman, come to life again, whom he had seen with a knife through her heart, on the bed in the mysterious freight car.

CHAPTER VIII.

LIGHT UPON DARK EVENTS.

Neither Patsy nor the young woman who was his companion in misfortune was aware of his proximity, and he dared not make a sound until he was assured that he would not be heard by other ears than theirs.

The iron door was securely locked. He discovered that at a glance, and also realized that it would not be an easy matter, even for him, to open it.

He was about to turn away as silently as before, to investigate further through the house—for he did not wish to be surprised in his work of liberating Patsy—when the young woman spoke again, addressing the young assistant.

"I hope you will have the courage to go through with the torture without a murmur, for it only delights him to see people suffer. He would smile like an angel if he could see you weep."

"I think," replied Patsy, "that I will suffer less than you. I should rather be the victim of such torture, than to be compelled to be a helpless witness of it, when practiced upon another."

She smiled sadly across the half-lighted room at him.

"So far," she said, "I have not seen much of torture, although he has told me that it is to come. One of his theories is that he can inure the most delicate person to the most horrible sights so that they can look unmoved upon scenes which ordinarily would turn the heart of a strong man faint with horror. I have never seen anybody tortured as he says he means to torture you. Doubtless he will not compel me to see it all."

"How long have you been an inmate of this awful house?" asked Patsy.

"I do not know. I have no means of remembering time. I am either drugged, or unconscious through hypnotism, almost all the time."

"And you have not lost your reason, either. It is incredible."

"My reason? No; I have kept that; but it seems benumbed, nevertheless. For example, I feel a great sorrow for you, but it is not the sorrow I would have felt for another, long ago—before I came here. Doctor Quartz says that I am the best subject he ever had, and that I should be glad that I can do so much for science."

Nick could see that Patsy shuddered. He was about turning away the second time, when Patsy spoke again.

"How long will it be before he returns?" he asked of his companion.

"He said he would leave us together for an hour. I should say that half that time is already gone, is it not?"

"More than that," said Patsy; and then, as if in support of his statement, Nick heard the sound of approaching footsteps in the lower hall, and he drew back away from the door, closed it, and shot the bolts back into place, and glided away up the stairs again, out of sight from the approaching person.

He had not an instant to spare.

Scarcely had he secured a safe distance, when the footfalls came up the stairs, and at last paused in front of the door through which the detective had just been listening.

There was sufficient light in the hall so that Nick could see him, and he drew one of his revolvers and leveled it at the human devil.

For a moment he was almost determined to shoot, and so put an end at once and forever to the career of Doctor Quartz; but for some reason he did not fire. It was not in his nature to shoot a man down in cold blood, although he felt that he would be eminently justified in doing so in this case.

Quartz undid the fastenings of the doors, after which he unlocked the iron grating, pushed it open, and entered the prison room.

He did not take the trouble to close either of the doors behind him, but continued on his way into the room, until he stood in the center of it, exactly between his two prisoners.

He paused there, and looked from one to the other of his prisoners, with an expression on his face and in his eyes which was entirely new to Nick Carter.

"I could imagine such an expression as that on the face of a sleepwalker," thought the detective; and he leaned forward to examine the man the closer.

Doctor Quartz's face was as white as alabaster. The blood seemed to have entirely forsaken his cheeks, leaving them like the countenance of a corpse. His eyes, too, were dazed and glassy, and they seemed to stare upon his two victims without really sensing their presence.

"Is it possible," thought Nick, "that the man is the victim of some drug habit, and that he is now under the influence of whatever drug he takes? It would seem so. He certainly is not himself."

The oily, unctuous smile of Doctor Quartz was gone. The full lips, usually so red and so ready to smile, were stretched across his teeth as if in a half snarl, and were of the color of dirty chalk.

In fact, it was altogether a different man from the Doctor Quartz we have already seen, who stood there in the prisonlike room, confronting his two victims who were chained to the wall, and who should have called forth the pity from a heart of stone.

And much to Nick's surprise, at this juncture, the young woman spoke again.

"You may talk on," she said to Patsy. "He will not hear you, or if he hears, he will not heed. I have seen him like this once before, and, oh, it was horrible! That was when he killed my cousin before my eyes, long, long ago. I do not know where it was, only that it was in another city."

"Your cousin," said Patsy. "That was the body we found in the freight car, with a dagger through her heart."

"Yes," she replied, "it must have been she whom you found, although he did not stab her—he choked her to death with his hands. Oh, my God! it was awful. I am glad that I cannot feel things as I did then. He was in just such a mood then as he is now. He looked the same as he looks now; and he turned on me, and would have killed me in the same way, only that the mood left him before he reached me, the color came back to his face, and he turned and looked at the corpse of my cousin in astonishment, as if he did not know, until then, that he had attacked her. Now, perhaps he will kill us both. I only hope that I will be his first victim. Hush!"

Doctor Quartz had turned toward her, as if the sound of her voice had disturbed him, and for a moment they all held their breath, while Nick Carter raised his revolver, ready to use in case of necessity.

But after a moment the doctor's chin sank upon his breast, as if he had drifted away again to the land of unreality; and then the young woman spoke again.

"Do I shock you with my seeming apathy to all these horrors?" she asked. "You would not wonder at it if you were aware of a tithe of what I have been compelled to see and hear ever since I fell into the power of that fiend—for fiend he is; you can never make me believe that he is human. I am used to horrors. I am accustomed to seeing murder, and talking about it. I am gradually losing my sense of perception between right and wrong, and I no longer have the quality of compassion in me, I fear. I know that Doctor Quartz murdered my father and my mother, as well as my cousin Alice and her father and mother, and yet I can speak of it and think about it all, and even touch his hands and talk with him about their deaths, without a shudder. He says he will eventually make me like Zanoni; but if he does, the first thing I will do then will be to kill him for it."

"Who is Zanoni?" asked Patsy, almost whispering the words, for he could not speak as she did, in the presence of that corpselike man who stood between them as if he were in a trance.

"Zanoni? She is the only person in the world who inspires Doctor Quartz with fear. See! He is shivering now, at the mere mention of her name. Zanoni, the terrible. Zanoni, the awful. Zanoni, the witch! Look at him! See him tremble!"

And indeed Doctor Quartz was trembling. He turned his head from side to side as if he could see out of his glazed eyes, and, looking at him closely, one might have seen that red spots of blood were gathering in the corners of them—the sort of red spots which appear in the eyes of a maddened bull when it is about to charge.

"Hush!" said the girl. "For your life do not speak now."

But there was another who acted then, for Nick Carter leaped through the doorway into the room, and with a quick bound, lighted upon the back of Doctor Quartz and struck him over the temple with the butt of his revolver.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CONFESSIONS OF NANINE.

The blow seemed to do for Doctor Quartz what he had in vain attempted to do for himself; that is, to throw him out of that dazed condition which had held him in its grasp ever since the moment he entered the room.

The instant when Nick Carter leaped upon him, he seemed to come to himself again; but already the blow from the butt of the revolver had fallen.

It was a heavy weapon, and it was wielded by no light and delicate touch; but heavy as the blow was, it only staggered the man beneath it.

And, even as he staggered, Nick raised his other hand and dealt him a second blow, this time with his fist, so that he and Doctor Quartz fell to the floor together, the latter underneath, the detective on top.

But the man, even under the violence of those two blows, was so strong and his vitality was so great, that he struggled as few could have done, even then.

On the other hand, Nick Carter knew what sort of a man he had tackled. He had once before had occasion to feel the strength of Doctor Quartz's muscles, and he knew that it required all his own to master him under any circumstances.

And he did not hesitate to use every art and every advantage he could employ in gaining ascendency over the doctor.

As they fell to the floor, the detective struck him again and again, always with violence, and always as forcibly as if it were the first blow he was delivering; and by dropping the revolver from his right hand he managed to secure a pair of handcuffs from his pocket, and to force them upon the wrists of the doctor before he could prevent the act.

And still the man struggled and fought with all his might, so that Nick, even then, in order to conquer him, seized again the weapon from the floor and dealt with it another blow which was effectual, and which stiffened him out for a moment; and then Nick lost no time in fastening another pair of shackles to his ankles.

There was blood upon the doctor's face when Nick rolled him over—blood where the butt of the revolver had cut through the skin, and where Nick Carter's knuckles had made an abrasion or two; but there was also a smile on his lips, and the detective saw that he was now entirely conscious, and so again master of himself, if not of circumstances.

"You caught me napping, Carter," he said, with cool assurance. "Otherwise you would be here, where I am, and I would be there, where you are."

"It is much better as it is," replied Nick grimly. "I think, doctor, that we will prove something against you a little sooner than you anticipated."

"You certainly have turned the tables for the moment; but, don't forget that you are not out of the house yet."

"Oh, no, I won't forget. Don't worry."

As Nick spoke, he saw Doctor Quartz turn his eyes toward the girl who was chained to the wall, and he saw come into them that hard, determined expression which he knew indicated an effort on the part of a hypnotist to exert his power.

As quick as a flash he leaped between the doctor and his victim, and the same instant he struck the man a sharp blow across the eyes with the flat of his hand.

"Damn you!" said the doctor; but Nick did not wait to hear more, or to reply. Instead he seized the man in his arms and dragged him through the door into the hall outside; and once there, he calmly tied a bandage over his eyes, and with a third pair of handcuffs, fastened him to a spindle in the balustrade.

"I am going back inside the room now, doctor, to have a little talk with our two friends who are in there; but I shall remain where I can keep you in sight, and if you make any effort to free yourself, don't forget that I am a dead shot, and that I shall not hesitate to prove it."

"Faugh!" said the doctor. "Go there, if you like. Don't worry me by talking to me. The tables shall be turned on you before you are an hour older."

"You seem to take things quite easy," said Nick, smiling.

"Why not?"

"This is a case where the mouse is playing with the cat, isn't it, doctor?"

"Why, yes, it would almost seem so."

"And yet, you seem to keep your nerve with you."

"My nerves? They are of iron, as you will know some day. A nerve of iron and a heart of ice; that is it, Carter."

Nick turned without making a reply, and reëntered the room beyond the iron grating. Ten-Ichi, waiting on the roof, was altogether forgotten, or, if remembered, unheeded.

Nick's first duty inside the room was to free Patsy from the chains which bound him; he next crossed to the girl, and in a moment he had freed her also, for the keys which fitted the locks of the chains had been placed by the doctor upon a chair just out of the reach of his victims. Tantalizingly near, but sufficiently far away to be useless to them.

Nick silenced Patsy with a gesture; then he placed one of his own revolvers in the hand of the young assistant and motioned him to stand guard over the doctor in the hallway.

Then he turned again to the young woman.

Ever since his first leap into the room when he had attacked the doctor and so summarily overcome him, she had watched the detective with a peculiar expression on her sad but beautiful countenance. She seemed, indeed, as if she were endeavoring to understand what was taking place, but had not the ability to grasp its entire meaning.

Now, when he turned to her, she greeted him with a smile which was like the expression of a pleased child —and yet Nick saw that there was sufficient intelligence in her eyes to make her a competent witness.

"Tell me your name," he said kindly.

"My name?" she repeated after him. "I have almost forgotten it; but not quite. The doctor has refused to let me go by my own name since I have been with him."

"But you remember what it was, do you not?" asked the detective.

"Oh, yes. It was Nanine—Nanine Duclos."

"And the name of your cousin—that cousin whom you say the doctor killed before your eyes—that cousin whom Doctor Quartz choked to death and afterward placed in the freight car—what was her name?"

"Her name? It was Marie. Her last name was the same as mine, you know."

"Yes, I understand. Now, Nanine, the doctor has told you about the freight car, has he not?"

"Oh, yes, indeed!"

"Tell me what he told you about it."

"Why, the same as he told other people, I suppose."

"Never mind; tell me what he told you."

"Well, you know he was to marry Marie. All the arrangements had been made for the wedding, and he had built the car and was to have a fine time traveling in it. We lived in another city then. I don't know where it was, only that it was somewhere in the East."

"And I suppose," said Nick, leading her on as gently as he could, for he talked like a child upon whom horrors have made little or no impression, "that your father and mother and that Marie's father and mother were with you all that time, during the preparations for the wedding, were they not?"

"Oh, yes!"

"I heard you say that the doctor killed them, also. Did he put them in the car with your cousin?"

"Oh, yes; he said so. I suppose he did. He sent the car somewhere. You see, he did not mean to hurt Marie when he killed her. He did it in a fit of rage such as he has at times, when his face turns the color of chalk, and he goes mad. I have heard him say that some day he will kill himself in one of those mad fits. He says he cannot cure them, and it makes him wild when he thinks there is anything he cannot cure."

"What were the names of your father and mother? And what were the names of the father and mother of Marie?"

"My father and mother were George and Anne, and the others were Uncle Peter and Aunt Myra."

"Where did you live before you knew the doctor? Can you remember that?"

"Oh, yes. On Beacon Street, in Boston. We were all very happy then. Doctor Quartz came to us because Uncle Peter was ill. The doctor cured him. After that, Aunt Myra was very ill, and the doctor cured her, also. And then Marie was ill. We were all ill, one after another, and the doctor was so expert that he cured us all, and my father and my uncle gave him a great deal of money. But he earned it, I have heard them say, by saving the lives of all of us."

"Your father and your uncle were rich men, were they not?"

"I suppose so. I don't know."

"You kept horses and carriages and servants; eh?"

"Oh, yes. Lots of them; and now all those things are mine. I have heard the doctor say so. That is why he keeps me here, I think, so that nobody will get my money away from me."

"I understand. Now, why does he chain you in this room, as I found you? He does not keep you here all the time, does he?"

"Oh, no, indeed! I spend most of the time in a beautiful room where there are birds, and my pet cat. He waves his hands over me there, and puts me to sleep so that I have beautiful dreams, and forget all the things I do not wish to remember. I am always glad when he comes to me to give me those dreams."

"And you don't remember how long it is since you have been living so, do you?"

"No; only that it is a very long time. I have lived in this house a long time. I traveled a long way on the railroad before I came here, and, oh, it was a long time after he killed Marie and the others before we came here."

"Did the doctor ever tell you why he put all those dead people in the freight car to send them away somewhere?"

"No; he only laughed a great deal about it, and said it was a good joke, and that it would set the dogs to barking. He said that he would be there, wherever it was, when the dogs began to growl and bark, and that he would have fun in watching the leader of the pack trying to get upon the scent."

"Ah! He said that, did he? Did he also tell you the name of the leader of the pack?"

"Yes. He said the leader of them all would be Nick Carter, and that one day he would send him and his friends on the same sort of a journey."

CHAPTER X.

THE MAN OF IRON NERVE.

"You have not told me, yet, why he chains you here at times," insisted Nick.

"Why, to make me like Zanoni; to make me accustomed to horrors, he says. To make me love the sight of blood; the suffering of others; to make me like they are. And he is making me so. While I was talking with the young man who was chained to the wall, and whom you just set free, I found that I was anxious for the doctor to come so that I would see what he was going to do. Oh, yes; I am getting that way. I am getting like Zanoni."

"Who is Zanoni?"

"Zanoni, the terrible; Zanoni, the beautiful; Zanoni, the awful; Zanoni, the witch."

"But who is she?"

"The only person in the world whom Doctor Quartz fears; that is who she is."

"Does she live here?"

"I don't know. She comes and goes at will. She is mad. I have heard the doctor say that. She is mad. She is the success of one of his experiments. He says that he has destroyed her soul, and made her like an animal, only that she still has her cunning and her intelligence, so that she can appear in any part she pleases, and fool all the world. You would think her a saint from heaven, and she is a devil from hell. I have heard the doctor tell her those very words. Ah, I tremble when I think of Zanoni. She comes to my room sometimes, and heats an iron in the fire in the grate until it is red-hot, and then she waves it before my eyes and says that she is going to put them out so I won't be so beautiful. And sometimes she bares my arms to the shoulders and pricks them with needles until they smart terribly. She is a terrible woman; but, oh, so beautiful. And there is, somewhere, another young woman, who is beautiful, like me, and whom this Nick Carter that he speaks about, loves."

"Ah!" said Nick, breathing hard.

"And I have heard the doctor say that he is going to capture her and bring her here, when he has finished his education of me, and made me like Zanoni; and that then he is going to turn the other young woman, whose name is Carmen, over to us to torture. But I would never torture a girl like myself, although I know Zanoni would do so gladly."

The girl ceased speaking with a suddenness that astonished the detective, and he saw that she was staring in terror over his shoulder at something or some person behind him.

He turned involuntarily to see what it was, only to discover, standing in the doorway, confronting him, the figure of a young and beautiful woman, whose eyes were blazing out at him like the eyes of a mad person.

"Zanoni!" was the thought which came to him on the instant; and he started forward toward her, just as he saw, beyond her shadow, the figure of Patsy creeping toward her from the hallway.

It was evident that she had entered the room without seeing either Patsy or Doctor Quartz where Nick had left them, in the hallway.

There was a strange smile of menacing power on her face, and she was in the act of raising her right hand, which contained a pistol. And Nick understood from her attitude, and also from the expression of her eyes, that she intended to use it; that she meant to fire, and fire to kill, the instant the weapon should be on a level with his heart.

But Patsy was creeping toward her, and Nick saw that he would reach her before she could fire; and at the same instant, also, there came the sound of hammering against the street door. This was followed by a heavy crash, as the door fell in, and the detective remembered then the instructions he had given to Ten-Ichi, and he knew that the young assistant had gone to police headquarters and had brought officers with him to the house.

For the first time he realized how long a time had elapsed since he had descended through the scuttle from the roof.

As the crash of the falling door sounded through the house, Patsy leaped forward.

He seized Zanoni by the arms and pinioned them to her sides; and there he held her while the detective calmly stepped forward and secured her.

Strangely enough, she did not attempt to struggle. She stood quite still while the detective bound her so that she could not escape; and just as that was accomplished, Ten-Ichi, followed by the officers he had brought with him, entered the room.

It was a strange group, which, ten minutes later, was assembled in that room with the iron doors.

Nanine Duclos was seated on the floor at one side of the room, at the feet of Doctor Quartz, for, notwithstanding the fact that he had been in the hall with his eyes bandaged, he had managed, the moment that Nick ceased to talk to her, to gain his mesmeric, or hypnotic, power over her, and by the time the officers entered the room, she was completely under his control. She went to him, and she came back into the room with him, and refused to leave him, whimpering like a spoiled child when they attempted to force her from his side.

"Let her alone," was all that Nick said. "We will find a way to overcome that power later on."

Zanoni remained where they had seated her, passive, and, to all appearance, oblivious to everything that was taking place around her.

Doctor Quartz was seated in an armchair, calmly surveying the officers and the detectives who were grouped around him; and there was a smile of derision on his face—a smile which Nick could have sworn was precisely the same that the original Doctor Quartz delighted to use to show his utter contempt for his enemies.

"It is all up with you now, doctor," said Nick. "We know the story. Nanine has told me all, as you no doubt heard, and I think that the hangman's rope is awaiting you somewhat sooner than you anticipated."

"The rope is not yet made that will hang me," replied the doctor calmly.

"Nor the electric chair that will hold you, I suppose," said Nick.

"How wise you are, Carter!"

"The mouse is playing with the cat; eh?"

"No; the cat has merely permitted the mouse to go a little farther from its claws than was wise; but presently the cat will jump again, and the mouse will be under its paws once more."

"We will see," said the detective.

"Bah!" replied the doctor.

Nick turned toward Zanoni.

"Young woman," he said sternly, pointing at the doctor, "do you know this man to be a murderer?"

To the surprise of all, she calmly replied:

"I do."

"And do you know that he killed the five people in the freight car?"

"I do," she replied, as calmly as before.

"You will swear to that before a court, will you?"

"I will," she said; her expression did not change while she was making these replies, and she might have been made of stone or putty for all the feeling she manifested.

"That is enough," said the detective. "Take them all away, officers."

Doctor Quartz laughed aloud.

He did not appear to be in the least affected by what Zanoni had said.

"That chap is a man of iron nerve, at least," said one of the officers.

"An iron nerve, and a heart of ice," said the doctor, laughing; "eh, Carter?"

THE END.

In the next issue of this weekly—No. 789, to be published on February 10th—will be described one of the most thrilling of the famous detective's adventures. It is entitled "The Great Hotel Tragedies; or, Nick Carter's Dangerous Pursuit." The narrative has to do with the extraordinary experience of a bride and bridegroom who were pursued by the vengeance of Doctor Quartz, and affords further light on the mystery which surrounds some of the persons and incidents appearing in the story which is told in the present issue.

The Case of the Tan Glove.

By SCOTT CAMPBELL.

(A Two-part Story—Part II.)

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Felix Boyd, criminal investigator, is seated in a restaurant with James Coleman, of the central detective office, New York, when he is approached by Delmore, a young Wall Street broker, who introduces his friend, Talbot Gerry, whom Boyd remembers to have seen in Algiers two years before. Delmore explains that he wishes Boyd to determine whether a beautiful stone in Gerry's possession is a real diamond. Gerry says he obtained it the night before from a comparative stranger as collateral for a forty-dollar loan. Boyd pronounces the stone bogus. Shortly afterward Boyd is summoned to the office of Dabney & Co., jewelers, and there finds that, while looking over a tray of diamond rings, a beautiful young woman substituted twelve bogus diamonds for a like number of perfect stones. Boyd is informed that the woman represented herself as the wife of a certain young man who had been looking over the tray on the day before. From Gibson, the salesman, who had shown the gems, Boyd gets a tan glove that was worn by the young woman. He then purchases the table at which the woman had sat down to write a note. Boyd directs his boy, Terry, to phone to Coleman to meet him at the Hotel Tripoli at three o'clock.

CHAPTER III.

MASTERING THE GAME.

Upon emerging from the jewelry store, Boyd hastened to his waiting carriage.

"To the Hotel Tripoli, cabby," he sharply commanded. "Lose not a moment, mind you. The same fee goes."

"It's up to me, sir," nodded the hackman, quick to see that some serious emergency existed, and that each second was of value.

He drove through the noisy street at a rate of speed that threatened not only his own vehicle, but many another as well, and caused more than one blue-coated patrolman to start involuntarily, and also tardily, as if to stop him.

Reclining upon the cushions within, Mr. Felix Boyd was complacently smoking a cigar.

He threw it away when the carriage began to slow down, and again consulted his watch. It wanted eight minutes of three, as he sprang out upon the sidewalk in front of the hotel mentioned.

"Wait, cabby," said he, glancing sharply up and down the street.

"Right, sir."

In no direction was there any sign of Jimmie Coleman, yet Boyd did not defer operations pending his arrival. With the cabby gazing curiously after him, he quickly mounted the steps of the hotel, which was a tolerable brick edifice of six stories, and entered the open vestibule. There were numerous guests lounging about the inner office, and his entrance was not specially noticed.

Approaching the register, Boyd glanced rapidly at the names inscribed on the latest pages. Presently he lighted upon one in a curious, angular hand, which again brought that cold and relentless gleam to his searching eyes. The line across the page read:

"Mr. and Mrs. Philip Kelsey. City. 231."

The number was that of the suite occupied by the Kelseys.

Boyd did not summon a bell boy. He entered the elevator, located the suite mentioned, and presently approached the door.

That the rooms were occupied at that moment was immediately obvious—the key had been left in the door, on the hall side.

Once more Boyd glanced at his watch. It wanted three minutes of three. Then he knocked gently upon the closed door of Suite 231.

A voice from within called promptly:

"Come!"

Boyd drew himself up, smiled oddly for an instant, then gravely entered the room, closing the door behind him.

"I beg pardon, sir," said he, with a graceful bow. "I hope I do not intrude."

The remarks were addressed to a youthful, curly-haired chap, clad in a neat plaid suit, who had been surveying himself before a mantel mirror. He had turned when Boyd entered, however, and upon seeing him he gave vent to an involuntary ejaculation of surprise, more than half suppressed.

"I though it was my wife who rapped," he said quickly. "Haven't you made a mistake, sir?"

"I think not, providing the hotel register is reliable," Boyd unctuously rejoined, bowing and smiling. "I am looking for Mrs. Philip Kelsey. I presume that you, sir, are Mr. Kelsey."

"Yes, that is my name," bowed the young man. "My wife is absent just now, however."

Kelsey appeared pale, strangely pale, and his fair features were tensely drawn; yet he steadily met Boyd's gaze with his dilated blue eyes, and his rather effeminate voice never faltered.

"When will your wife return, Mr. Kelsey?" inquired Boyd, quite affably.

"I cannot say, sir."

"No?"

"I have just come in myself. What is your business with her, please?"

"I would prefer to inform her, providing she returns in time for——"

"Surely, sir, it cannot consist of anything of which I should be kept in ignorance," interrupted Kelsey, with a dark frown sweeping to his fair, attractive face.

Boyd laughed softly, and shook his head.

"Why, no, of course not," said he. "It consists of nothing very important. I am a messenger from Messrs. Dabney & Co., the jewelers, of Maiden Lane. Your wife called there this afternoon to look at the ring you contemplate buying. Unfortunately, Mr. Kelsey dropped one of her gloves, which was found after she departed, and I have been sent here to return it to her."

And Mr. Felix Boyd drew the tan glove from his pocket, and advanced to place it upon the table.

Kelsey had grown as white as the linen at his throat, yet his nerve did not appear to forsake him. He drew himself up, forcing a sickly smile to his drawn lips, and directed one furtive glance toward the closed door, between which and him Mr. Felix Boyd remained standing.

"This is very kind of you, yet you have been to needless trouble," said he, with a slight shrug of his shoulders. "The glove is worth but little. You may leave it, sir, and I will hand it to my wife."

"Ah, yes, thank you," drawled Felix Boyd.

Yet he did not depart.

Kelsey regarded him for a moment, as a cat watches a mouse.

"Is there anything more?" he abruptly demanded. "Why do you remain?"

"To see that your wife gets her glove," smiled Boyd.

"I tell you that I will hand it to her when she returns," cried Kelsey impatiently.

"I would prefer to wait until she returns, if it's all the same to you."

"Absurd! She may be absent for some time."

"Nevertheless, Mr. Kelsey, I will wait," persisted Boyd. "My patience will not be severely tried, and I wish to see her."

"For what?"

"You shall know when she arrives."

Kelsey no longer could command himself, a fact of which he was painfully obvious. He stood trembling visibly, with hands clenched as if to govern his perturbation, while his glittering eyes had taken on the hunted look of an animal at bay.

Suddenly he stepped forward, as if hit with an idea.

"If you are thus determined," he cried resentfully, "I'll see if I can find her. She may be in the room of a friend across the hall. I'll see if she is there, and will bring——"

But Felix Boyd fell back a step, and checked him with a gesture.

"Stop a bit," he curtly commanded. "You need not bring her, Mr. Kelsey."

"But——"

"I prefer that you should wait with me until she arrives."

"For what reason?" the young man now cried angrily. "This is absurd! For what reason, I say?"

"Once more—you shall know when she arrives."

"But I can bring her——"

"I do not wish it."

"This is absurd—I'll not submit to it!" cried Kelsey, with his voice grown shrill, and his lithe, slender figure shaken with passion. "Let me pass! Let me pass, I say! I'll see if I can find her."

Boyd threw out his arm, and now cried sternly:

"You will remain here, Mr. Kelsey."

The young man fell back a step, with hands fiercely clenched and lips mutely twitching. For a moment he seemed at a loss what to do. Then his restless glance, which had been darting from window to door and from door to window, suddenly saw that the key of the door was missing—he knew it was where he had left it—in the hall outside.

He seized upon the one bare chance the situation presented, yet was crafty even in his swelling desperation. He turned on his heel and strode to one side, nearer the window, crying shrilly:

"You are mad—stark mad, sir! Unless you let me go, I will ring for help! You shall be ejected from my rooms! You shall be——"

At that point he turned, however, with face convulsed with desperate resolution. With a bound as light as that of a panther, he leaped toward the door, his design being to gain the hall and quickly lock Boyd in the room.

Boyd had suspected his intentions, however, and met him halfway. With a leap to one side he caught the frenzied man in his arms, crushing him for an instant to his breast.

Then came the culmination—the very last discovery Boyd, with all his discernment, anticipated.

For a mingled scream and moan of anguish and dismay broke from Kelsey's lips, and Boyd suddenly realized that the yielding form he held was—not that of a man!

"Good God!" he cried, with an irrepressible gasp. "A woman!"

Involuntarily he had released her, and fell back toward the door. He now saw it all, this game from beginning to end, and that the clever and crafty party confronting him was but little more than a girl, surely not above twenty-five. That her cunning did not end with this unexpected disclosure of her sex, however, he very speedily learned.

A flood of crimson had risen over the face of the shrinking girl, whose passionate frenzy appeared instantly dispelled. Mute and abashed, she stared for a moment at Boyd's startled countenance, then suddenly buried her face in her hands, and burst into a flood of tears.

Boyd had no time for expressing sympathy, however, even if so inclined. He at once produced the box of bogus rings, saying curtly:

"I also have brought these home to you, young woman, along with the crime that goes with them. A very shrewd game you've been playing, for a fact. Luckily I——"

"Oh, I'll confess, sir! I'll confess all!" interrupted the girl, with her voice choked with welling sobs. "I am guilty. My name is Celeste——"

"Yes; I'm well aware of it."

"You know that, too?"

"Where are the stolen rings? Come, come, tears will not avail you anything. I want the rings at once, and——"

"They are here, they are here, sir," sobbed and moaned the girl, tottering to a desk in one corner of the room. "Oh, oh, if I return them, sir, can I not avoid prosecution? That is my first offense, and I——"

"Enough of that," said Boyd sternly, as he joined her at the desk. "In this bag, eh? Yes, so they are, the entire lot. A very clever job, my girl, I'm sure. You now will have to go with me."

Sobbing as if her heart were breaking, Celeste, which was really her name, had produced a small plush bag from the desk, in which Boyd quickly discovered the missing rings. With his last remarks he thrust the bag into his pocket, and laid his hand on the arm of the weeping girl.

"But I—I can't go thus!" she moaned piteously. "I—I first must make a change. At least let me—let me put on suitable clothing."

"This suit served you well enough in your knavery," growled Boyd, glancing about.

"But I—I——"

"Where are your other garments?" interrupted Boyd, with implacable austerity.

"In the next room—see for yourself," wept Celeste. "It will take but little time for me to change——"

"I propose to see for myself," growled Boyd, striding toward the room indicated. "No back-stairway escape for you, my clever miss, take my word for that."

"Indeed, sir, I'll not attempt it."

"See that you don't. I'll let you make the change, since I shall wait here for your confederate, who should presently——"

He was interrupted. A clock on a church near by struck three. The last clang of the bell had not sounded, however, when a heavy hand was laid on the knob of the door.

The face, voice, and bearing of Celeste changed like a flash. She darted to one side, with her eyes fairly blazing, and uttered a single piercing shriek.

"Don't enter! Beware!" she screamed wildly.

Felix Boyd wheeled toward the door as if electrified.

The girl's warning had come just a second too late. The intruder had the door partly open when Boyd turned, and the latter beheld his face.

"God! The Big Finger!" he roared involuntarily.

So, indeed, it was; and the man's hard, vicious countenance, when he beheld Felix Boyd in the room, took on a change that pen could not describe. A criminal and a cur always, less loyal to the girl than she had been to him, the Big Finger looked after himself alone. As Boyd sprang toward him he closed the door with a thundering bang—and turned the key.

Boyd instantly whipped out his revolver, and fired three shots through the door.

A yell of derision answered them.

Then the closing of a second door fell upon his ear. He swung round with an oath. He alone stood in the curling smoke that now filled the chamber. Celeste had darted into the inner room, and closed and locked the door.

"Good-by! Good-by, Mr. Officer!" she screamed, through the panel, as Boyd wrenched vainly at the knob. "You may see me later—unless I see you first!"

It was a situation and turn of affairs to have enraged any man, yet it served only to bring into play all that was most daring and desperate in Felix Boyd's nature. With a snarl of suppressed fury he darted to one of the front windows, and threw it open to look down. The central-office man was at that moment entering the hotel.

"Jimmie! Jimmie!" shrieked Boyd, discharging his revolver into the air. "Jimmie, I say!"

Coleman halted and looked up.

"The Big Finger—inside!" yelled Boyd, like a man in a frenzy. "The Big Finger! Nail him as he comes down!"

Coleman waved his hand, and dashed into the house.

Boyd then turned and darted through an adjoining room of the suite, and reached one of the rear windows. On a heavy iron hook in the casing hung a long coil of rope, a fire escape, knotted at intervals. Without an instant's hesitation Boyd threw open the window, and cast out the line.

Then he went over the sill, and, suspended sixty feet above the pavements, he lowered himself to the window below that from which he had emerged, which, fortunately, was open.

He swung himself into the room. The suite corresponded to the one above. Darting into the room below that in which Celeste had eluded him, Boyd discovered a door leading to a back stairway.

He never could have told just how he went down the three flights of stairs, or why his brains were not knocked out in the headlong descent. As he came down the last flight, however, he found himself in a side corridor of the hotel, not far from the office. For an instant he scarce knew which way to turn in search of his quarry, for there was not a person in sight.

Then, darting out of a coat room near by, into which she had entered in the hope of securing a hat or cap, came—Celeste!

She recoiled as if struck with a whip—and then Felix Boyd again had her in his arms.

"So, so, my pretty maid!" he cried triumphantly. "Despite that you're a woman—I'll hold you this time!"

"Hold and be d——d!" hissed Celeste, with resentful eyes upturned to his.

Just before five o'clock that afternoon, Mr. Felix Boyd, accompanied by the central-office man, entered the private office of Dabney & Co., in which the head of the firm then was seated. Placing a small pasteboard box and a plush bag on the merchant's desk, Boyd said quietly:

"Here are your stolen rings, Mr. Dabney, in this bag. The box of bogus ones—ah, well, you may keep them as a gift from your humble servant."

Dabney, with shaking hands, tore open the dainty bag and viewed its glittering contents.

"All here! Every one!" he cried, leaping up. "Good heavens, Mr. Boyd, how did you accomplish it?"

Boyd laughed softly, and dropped into the nearest chair.

"Very easily," said he, dryly. "If you carefully examine the lacquer table which I—ahem!—recently purchased, you will find that, in writing her note on a single sheet of paper, the pencil used by the thief was applied so forcibly, probably under secret excitement, that the polished surface of the table carries a faint indentation of each word that she inscribed."

"Ye gods!"

"If you tip the table so that the light strikes it properly, you may read with but little difficulty: 'Exchange made! Hotel Tripoli, three sharp! Celeste.'"

"Good heavens! Is that so?"

"Decidedly so," smiled Boyd. "That appointment thus discovered, Mr. Dabney, the rest was comparatively easy."

Dabney threw both hands into the air.

"If you ever ask me for a bill of that table, Mr. Felix Boyd," he cried, with a ringing laugh, "you will offend me beyond telling."

"Good enough, sir," smiled Boyd, rising to go. "I will keep the table as a reminder of a deucedly clever and dangerous woman."

"You certainly measured her correctly, Felix," said Coleman, reverting to Boyd's last remark, as the two men sauntered toward Pine Street.

"Yes, so I think, Jimmie," nodded Boyd. "It's well we have her behind the bars."

"Yet what an infernal shame that her confederate escaped," growled Coleman. "Do my very best, Felix, I could not locate him."

"Humph!" laughed Boyd. "It's not the first time we have found the Big Finger too slippery for us. But we'll land him yet—sooner or later we'll land him. Take my word for that, Jimmie, dear boy. Here, have a Henry Clay."

THE END.

A Night With Lisping Jimmie.

By W. B. M. FERGUSON.

One of Jimmie Blunt's peculiar beliefs is that chance plays a very small part in criminal annals, and that, in nine cases out of ten, a crime, if traced back far enough, will lead you to another. Jimmie has many peculiar beliefs, and, being the best man the Central Office owns, can afford to air them in company with his physical peculiarities—a soft lisp, eyeglass, and a cane. In fact, "Lisping Jimmie," as he patters down the street, his cane tapping, tapping the sidewalk, his supposedly near-sighted eyes peering up at one like a rabbit, has many times been mistaken for the guileless fool he looks. But no one makes that error twice.

Being "headquarters man" for the *Star*, I am a particular friend of Jimmie's, and I know that the non-magnifying glass of his spectacles is the least thing about him that conveys one impression while meaning another. But even I do not know him well. I suspect that he has as much potentiality as a stick of dynamite, and is as unostentatiously dangerous. Also, I think he possesses the most accommodating memory of any one I ever met. It is like a sensitized film; faces, events—everything he has ever encountered is photographed upon it indelibly, ready for instant reproduction.

His mental rogues' gallery is perfect. He knows the history of every prominent crime the world over as well as you may know the stock market—and even on the latter Jimmie could give you a rub, for his rôles on life's stage have been many. To finish, he is a mimic of the first water. All these assets stand him in excellent stead in his rôle of crime detector. Perhaps the "Boulevard Affair" offers the most complete example of his peculiar genius.

I suppose you all remember that affair at the Boulevard Hotel. It happened three summers ago. It was a murder case, and New York had it every morning for breakfast for close on to a week. Of course, Inspector Jones got all the credit for the round-up, the press boomed him along, and everybody was satisfied—even Lisping Jimmie, who played out the hand alone.

Jimmie sidesteps the press, for, as he has carefully explained to me, anonymity is his capital. "And how," he says, "can you hope to run down a criminal if he knows you the moment you turn a corner? Give all the puffs to the seats of the mighty," he adds, "and let me continue to draw my fifty a week and go on striking in the dark—I'll always strike something."

Reporters are natural liars, but you won't be long in the "Row" if you have not learned to lie with discretion. Therefore, I have always respected Lisping Jimmie's wishes as regards publicity, and consequently have been rewarded by his confidences which, more than once, have developed into a "beat." But the Boulevard affair is over now, and a "story" even a few hours old is ancient scrip to the press—worthless stuff. Again, Jimmie foams at the mouth when he sees a magazine. He never reads one, for he is a reformed author himself. Therefore, I can give the inside history of that famous case with perfect freedom.

It was a hot night in late July when the news of a mysterious murder and robbery at the Boulevard Hotel came over the wires, and almost the first person I saw as I swung out for Broadway was Lisping Jimmie himself.

"Ha! the carrion thents the corpth from afar, eh, Billy?" he said, as we boarded a north-bound car together. "S'death! Blood! Blood and money, Billy! Blood and money! They alwayth go hand in hand."

"They say it's a big thing," I ventured, my nerves tingling. I was young then, and a night with Lisping Jimmie was like an electric shower bath. You never knew when a shock was coming or from where.

"What lie did they hand you?" said Jimmie, tapping his patent leathers with his cane.

"One of the patrons of the hotel found stabbed to the heart half an hour ago. Had been dead only a short time. Money, watch—everything gone," I said. And I ran on regarding surmises, possible clews, et cetera.

"Thank you," drawled Jimmie, as I finished. He was openly flirting with a girl across the car. "Have you theen the new show at the Broadway?"

That is Jimmie's way. He is a natural-born clam opener, but his mouth or ears don't leak a drop. Nor could I get a word from him on the way up to the hotel.

"Tag on. Keep mum and you'll hear the band play—I think," was all he would say.

We found the Boulevard more quiet than we expected. The first batch of reporters, officials, ghouls, et cetera, that every crime attracts, had come, and Dunn, the manager, had seen that they had gone when their business was over. Dunn's as jealous of his hotel's reputation as he is of his own.

"It's a devil of a business," he confided to us in his private office. "Why can't a man see to it that he's murdered decently in his own place or in the street instead of mussing up hotels? We don't give murder policies with our rooms." He smiled grimly as he turned to Jimmie. "You old stormy petrel! there's nothing doing in your line to-night. The thing's a mystery—cuss it!"

"Think tho?" yawned Jimmie, carefully selecting the most comfortable chair in the room. "Tell uth how it happened before we go up to view the thenery. Been claimed yet?"

Dunn shook his head. "His name was Boyd. You'll see him upstairs, for the coroner's as slow as a funeral.

Mr. Boyd came last week, registering from Chicago. We gave him room two-fifteen——"

"Who's on the other thide?" said Jimmie.

"Two-fourteen is a Mrs. Hammond, a deaf old party. Two-sixteen is vacant. No rooms opposite. Single corridor. Oh, there's nothing doing there. It must have been an outside job. They all agree on that."

"Who got next?" drawled Jimmie, head in hands.

"Bell boy twenty-one," said Dunn, paring his nails. "He was up with ice water in the second corridor, and while passing two-fifteen he noticed that the door was ajar. He thought that queer, as there was no light. Now, Mr. Boyd wore some costly jewelry, and he never checked it at the desk. I often said he would be robbed if he wasn't more careful, but he always laughed at me. He took his own risk. So twenty-one thought something was wrong. He knocked, and, getting no reply, entered. Mr. Boyd, fully dressed, was stretched across the bed, stabbed to the heart."

"Weapon found?" I asked.

"No," said Dunn laconically.

"What would you value the mithing jewelry at?" said Jimmie, nursing his knee.

Dunn considered. "It wasn't phony. I'm a pretty fair judge. Well, I know he wore three rings, sleeve links, watch, and scarfpin, which I should say summed up about a couple of thousands. Of course, he very likely had more in his room, and then there was his wallet."

"Came off about ten, eh?" said Jimmie pleasantly. "No noise or anything? Funny. Motive, robbery. Outside job. H'm!" And he commenced to hum softly to himself. When Jimmie hums, things are just about beginning to move. "Let's go on up, Billy," he said to me, after a moment's solo. "And, say, Dunn, give us bell boy twenty-one to light the way. No chance of him being the murderer, eh?"

Dunn laughed softly.

"Oh, you detectives! Yes, he's very likely your man. Of course, he's only fourteen, and with a good record. But those little details don't matter. He's been questioned to a standstill. He and the staff have been searched. Merely a matter of form, you know."

"And what's your theory?" said Jimmie idly.

"Simply that it's an outside job, of course," said Dunn testily. "So is it Captain Crowe's opinion and the other fellows'. It's the only one that will hold water. Very simple, too. A sneak thief gets in—in big hotels you can't watch everybody—and goes to Mr. Boyd's room. Mr. Boyd had left his door open, or maybe the thief used skeletons. Very likely Mr. Boyd was asleep, lying down after dinner, and the thief killed him before he could cry out. Then the thief quietly makes his escape."

"Highly probable," said Jimmie, as bell boy twenty-one appeared, to conduct us upstairs. He was a nice little boy, with frank gray eyes, and, despite the gruesome affair, cheerful and loquacious.

In the death room a big policeman was sitting stolidly, but, on our entrance, Jimmie gave him the high sign, and told him to wait in the corridor until he had finished. There was an uneasy atmosphere in the corridor, though the hour was late, and most of the guests on that floor had given notice of their leave-taking. The fact that the body of the murdered guest had not been removed acted like a hurry call upon the Boulevard's tenants.

Lisping Jimmie carefully removed his light summer gloves, stood his inseparable cane in a corner, and approached the huddled, sheet-covered thing on the bed while I occupied a chair by the window. The bell boy, with round eyes, was watching Jimmie's educated fingers as they felt and probed the wound.

"Must have scared you, sonny, when you ran into this in the dark," commented the detective conversationally.

"Yes, sir," said Buttons.

"How did you know at first he was dead, and not merely sleeping?" said Jimmie. "I suppose you lit up first?"

"Yes, sir," said Buttons.

"And then you looked in the mirror—and saw Mr. Boyd lying dead on the bed, eh?" added Jimmie. "And it gave you such a scare you spilled a lot of ice water on that bureau cover, eh?"

Buttons' eyes, as did my own, strayed to the slightly wet splash on the immaculate bureau cover. I had not noticed it until Jimmie had mentioned it.

"Yes, sir," said the bell boy again.

"Just so," said Jimmie, and, raising his clenched fist, he struck the chest of the corpse a resounding blow.

"Good night, sir," said Buttons, going to the door. Evidently Jimmie's weird pugilistic exhibition had disturbed him, as it had me.

"Good night," said Jimmie, without looking round. "Here, boy! Wait a minute. Bring me that chair there. No, not that one—yes, that morris chair."

It was a very heavy chair, of solid oak, and the bell boy, though willing, could not lift it. I got up to help him, when Jimmie cut in: "Never mind. I'll sit here on the bed."

"All right. Good night, sir," said the boy again.

"Good night," said Jimmie, and, getting up before the retreating Buttons, calmly locked the door. Then he sat on the bed, chin in hand, and his eyeglasses raked number twenty-one through and through.

"Well?" he said quietly, at length.

"What, sir?" said Buttons placidly.

"Where have you hidden them?" snapped Jimmie sharply, leaning forward. "Out with it, now!"

"What——" began the boy.

But, in a flash, Jimmie was off the bed and was shaking Buttons noiselessly, savagely, until I thought the boy's head would fly off. Then the detective flung him up against the wall, slapped him across the face, and stood over him, his eyes as cold and malignant as a cobra's.

"You don't lie to me," he said quietly. "I know your kind and what medicine you want—a good smash in the mouth, and you'll get it, too! That's all you're afraid of—manhandling. Where's that jewelry? I'll give you just one chance. The cop's out there in the hall. Open up sharp, or I'll knock you hell-west-and-crooked, and see that you go up for this murder."

Then, for the first time, I noticed that "Lisping Jimmie's" soft lisp had disappeared. Then I knew that he was out for blood.

The bell boy looked at Jimmie—only once. His face paled, and he commenced to squirm. He wasn't the kind that cries.

"I—I didn't kill him. Honest," he said sullenly.

"I know that already," said Jimmie, with a shake. "But you came in here to rob him, you little skunk, when you found his door open. Then you saw murder had been done, and you cleared out with the stuff before giving the alarm. Where did you hide it?"

"Will you let me off?" said the boy nervously.

"Maybe," said Jimmie tersely. "I'm after bigger game—you rat! Now, smoke up fast. I haven't the time to search for it, but I'd get it, if I did; don't fool yourself on that."

"I bunked it in the water cooler, in the hall," said Buttons, with an ingenuous sniff.

"Get it. Go with him, will you, Billy?" said Jimmie, turning to me. "Bring him back with you."

I went with him. Buttons shied as he passed the waiting policeman.

Law in full regalia seemed to impress him more than the undress article. In a turn of the corridor stood a large silver water cooler on an onyx table. Buttons, after a careful look round, raised the lid, put down an arm into the ice water, and brought out a dripping hand in which lay a collection of jewelry. I recognized, among the articles, Billy Dunn's mental inventory. But there was one article that looked out of place—a long, steel hatpin with a cross hilt like a sword.

"It was a dead safe bunk," grinned Buttons to me. "I'd 'a' got them out to-night, all right." He seemed impervious to morality.

"I'd like to pay your funeral expenses," was all I said as I accompanied him back to the death room. I was wondering how and where Lisping Jimmie had acquired his profound knowledge of the hotel bell boy. I was learning rapidly.

Without a word, Jimmie took the jewelry I handed over. He examined it, humming softly to himself. The rings, et cetera, he laid on the bureau, but the watch and hatpin he retained. He opened the back of the watch. I noticed his innocent-looking eyes narrow behind their glasses. Then he turned to Buttons, who was in two minds whether to smile at his recent narrow escape or to look for further trouble.

"Where did you find this?" asked Jimmie slowly, balancing the hatpin in his hand.

"On the bureau," said Buttons.

"You may go," said Jimmie curtly. "I'll see Dunn about you later." For a minute or so my friend sat silently on the bed, chin in one hand, the hatpin lying idly in the palm of the other. Then he handed it to me. "Nice little article, eh?" he said.

I examined it curiously. It was about six inches long, of finely tempered steel, and its cross hilt was studded with imitation rubies. The blade, perhaps, was a sixth of an inch wide.

"The weapon?" I asked slowly.

Jimmie nodded. "I knew it must be something like that. The man hardly bled at all, the puncture was so small."

"*Cherchez la femme?*" I asked. "Of course, it's a woman's."

Jimmie grunted. "That was driven up to the hilt. The man's chest is powerfully developed—hard as steel. Could a woman's strength have been behind the blow? Not on your life. It must have been a terrific, instantaneous blow, killing immediately."

"Suicide——" I began.

"Be blowed!" said Jimmie. "Nor was Boyd asleep, either, when his finish came. The blow was struck upward—from a short, strong man. The wound is on the right side, too."

"What of it?" I asked.

"Nothing," said Jimmie laconically. "I guess we're through here."

He wrapped the jewelry in his handkerchief and thrust it into his pocket. "I want to see Dunn again. Come in."

"Well, any news?" said Dunn, half ironically, as we entered his office.

Jimmie shrugged his shoulders. "Don't understand the case at all. Surely some one must have heard an outcry or some conversation."

Dunn impatiently shook his head. "I tell you no. All that ground has been worked over. The east room, next door, is vacant, and the one on the other side is occupied by a half invalid—an old lady, as deaf as a post. She couldn't hear Gabriel's trumpet. She's half scared to death over the affair, and has already given us notice that she intends leaving to-night."

"Well, a lot of them are going," yawned Jimmie. "You can't really blame them. But I'd like to question that old party. Old women as a rule don't let much escape them. Probably she knows something, and is afraid to tell for fear of the consequent publicity."

"Fiddlesticks!" said Dunn, with another shrug. "She's been interviewed to death already, and she's cranky over it. I doubt if she will see you. Still—— Why, hello! Here she comes, now."

A very old lady, leaning on a cane, had shuffled out of the elevator. She was of medium height, with snow-white hair. She wore spectacles, and was quietly but richly dressed in a mourning veil and widow's weeds.

Jimmie laughed as he turned away. "I guess I'll renig. A widow with troubles of her own. There's no information in that old party. Let's smoke a cigarette, Billy, before we hit the fresh air. I'm dead tired."

We seated ourselves in a near-by settee, and Jimmie commenced to describe to me the new play at the Broadway. The widow, Mrs. Hammond, had gone to the desk. She was ludicrously deaf, and spoke to the night clerk and Dunn in a high, querulous, falsetto voice. She carried a small valise, and she must have been a stingy old party, for I noticed she secreted her purse in it.

"I am going to the Alpha Hotel," she said, in answer to the manager's protestation and regret at her leave-taking. "I couldn't sleep in that horrible room for all the world. I am glad now that my trunks did not come here. Kindly have them sent to the Alpha, if they arrive before I notify the express office of my change of address. Please call a cab. No, I don't require any help, thank you. I am not paralyzed," she added haughtily to a porter who had come forward. She marched stiffly to the door, head very erect, and leaning heavily on the cane.

"Highly pleasant old party," commented Jimmie, flipping his cigarette into a cuspidor. "Funny how a little accident will disturb some people. Come on, Billy. Good night, Dunn. Much obliged. See you some other time when there's more doing."

The highly pleasant old party was climbing stiffly into a cab as we reached the sidewalk. "The Alpha Hotel," we heard her order querulously to the driver.

Jimmie indolently watched it start off, then he seized me suddenly by the arm and dragged me with him into one of the string of hotel cabs waiting at the curb.

"Keep that cab for the Alpha Hotel in sight," he ordered sharply to the driver. "Keep half a block behind." And Jimmie rode with his head partly out of the window. "No stepping in one door and out another with me," he chuckled, half to himself.

"Where are we going?" I asked impatiently.

"To hear the band play," said Jimmie grimly. I knew enough not to ask further questions. But I was very much in the dark.

In twenty minutes we had drawn up at the Alpha Hotel.

"Quick," said Jimmie, flinging cabby a dollar. "She's gone in. Round to the entrance on the side street."

"But——" I began. But Jimmie had me by the arm, and we were racing up the avenue. We halted at the corner.

"Here she comes," said my companion tensely, after an anxious minute. I followed Jimmie's eyes down the quiet, darkened street. The little old lady had emerged from the hotel entrance.

"Making for Sixth Avenue. Come on," said Jimmie again.

Mrs. Hammond boarded a southbound train at the Thirty-third Street Station, and Jimmie and I watched her from the next car. She got off at Eighth Street, and we kept a respectful distance in the rear. It was tedious work, for Mrs. Hammond crawled along, and my curiosity and impatience were at the boiling point.

We followed her up Eighth Street to Fifth Avenue, and then north to Tenth Street. She stopped for a long time on the corner, and we jumped into a doorway. Then, finally, the little old woman turned east. Between Fourth and Third Avenues she entered a small, old-fashioned, red brick house. We waited five minutes before ascending the steps.

"Rather late for a call," grinned my companion. "This is a rooming house. Quite respectable, too. I know it very well." There is no person or house or thing in New York that Lisping Jimmie does not know.

In answer to our ring, a sleepy-looking German maid came to the door.

"Hello, Pretty!" said Jimmie. "Haven't seen you for some time. Heartbroken. No, we don't want a room. Friends of the old lady who just entered. Mrs.——"

"Fortescue," said the girl, as Jimmie stopped to agitate his memory.

"Exactly," said Jimmie. "This is an early morning call. No, never mind, we'll go right up. Oh, it's all right; old friends, you know. She is expecting us. Private business—lawyers, and all that. Top floor front? Thanks! All right, won't be a minute. Come on, Billy. Much obliged."

By this time Jimmie had closed the door and was halfway upstairs, sublimely oblivious of the girl's feeble suggestion that it was late, and that Mrs. Fortescue would, no doubt, prefer receiving the gentlemen in the parlor. A cyclone could not stop Lisping Jimmie.

We knocked at the door of "top floor front." A light was showing through the transom.

"Well?" said Mrs. Hammond's—or Forescue's—querulous voice.

Jimmie pitched his accommodating voice into the maid's sleepy Germanic gutturals. "Telegram, madam. Immediate."

"All right. Slip it under the door, though I don't know whom it can be from," said the old party.

Jimmie chuckled noiselessly.

"Must sign for it, madam."

"I can't be bothered. Sign it yourself," came the sharp reply.

"Madam forgets I cannot write the English," said Jimmie.

"Nuisance," said the high falsetto through the door. "Wait a minute, then."

We waited. Then the door was opened a crack. In a flash, Jimmie's cane, followed by his foot, was shoved through the opening. A quick shove—Jimmie's as strong as he doesn't look—and we were in the room, the door closed behind us. My companion leaned against the door, his hand thrust negligently into his coat pocket.

Mrs. Hammond stood confronting us. She had started back, momentarily bewildered by our abrupt and entirely unlooked-for entrance. She was in a long, loose kimono. It was a strong, hard face that I saw, now that it was unveiled and directly under the gas light. And it was not an old face. Her youthful-looking steel-blue eyes were snapping behind the spectacles. She held both arms folded across her breast; the right hand lost in the left sleeve of the kimono, the left hand in the right sleeve.

"Well?" she said at length hotly. "What does this impertinence mean?"

"Take your hands out of those sleeves," said Jimmie quietly but savagely. "I've seen that trick in Chinatown before this. I've a gun here in my pocket, and it'll go off through the coat before you know what's hit you."

"What do you mean?" began the woman shrilly. "How dare you——"

"Billy," cut in Jimmie, "catch hold of her wrist—stand to one side so I can blow her head loose if she moves. That's it. No, no—not that one. The left wrist, Billy, the left. That's it. Don't bat a winker, Mrs. Hammond, or it's good-by for yours. There, I thought so!"

I had wrenched a revolver from Mrs. Hammond's hidden left hand. It was a big hand. The woman stamped her foot in a fury.

"Cowards! Can't a woman protect herself——"

"Take her hair off, Billy," said Jimmie calmly. His gun was in his hand now, and it was as steady as his voice and eye. "Take it off, Billy. Don't be afraid. Don't move, Mrs. Hammond, you're not ready to die just yet. There! Now, don't you look real pretty, eh?"

I stepped back, with an involuntary cry of amazement and repulsion. Following Jimmie's strange instruction, I had laid hold of the woman's wealth of snowy hair—and it had come away in my hand. In its place was a huge, prison-cropped head.

And then, as I was gazing at this horrible-looking thing in the long kimono—this thing in the woman's dress with a man's head—its face livid with baffled venom, it suddenly snarled like a wild beast. In one instantaneous movement it had turned savagely upon me and struck—I went down before a crashing blow on the jaw. I remember hearing Jimmie laugh softly as the kimono sprang over me toward him. I waited for his gun to boom out, but it did not. Instead, like a striking snake, he reversed the heavy police revolver he held, sidestepped as gracefully and quickly as a champion bantamweight; and then, as the kimono came in upon him, the butt of the revolver crashed twice upon the vast acreage of prison-cropped head.

When I came to, the kimono sat huddled up on a chair, blood drying a muddy brown upon head and neck and face; handcuffs snaffling the wrists together. I do not care ever to see again the look that the half-closed eyes held.

Jimmie was seated on the bed, nursing his knee, and humming softly.

"Sorry you caught it," he said, as I rose, my head singing. "I should have warned you that we were after dangerous game, but I thought you already guessed that. I've sent for the hurry-up wagon. Know who our friend is, over there?"

"No," I said gloomily. I had lost one of my favorite teeth.

"It's Stevie Brown," said Jimmie pleasantly, "alias the Skirt, alias Old Mother Hubbard, alias Left-handed Stevie. Remember him? Well, it doesn't matter. It's the first time I've seen him, too, or his pal, Mr. Boyd, alias Big Red, alias Chicago Thompson. And their faces have never been in the gallery. They're too cute—but Boyd's in the past tense now, and this gentleman soon will be. But I know their records, eh, Stevie, boy?

"I guess I know how it all happened. Both you and Red pulled off that big Chicago robbery three years ago, and Red peached on you, and got off with the stuff while you went up. You broke jail last week and came on here to square the deal. Red had been successful, and was a high roller, knowing his face wasn't known here, and that swell hotels are not generally the place we are supposed to look for your breed. You ran him down. You can play a skirt to the limit, and you got the room next his in the Boulevard.

"You knocked at his door to-night—the corridor is lonely at that hour—and he recognized you. You made out you had forgiven the dirt he did you, and while talking to him—probably planning over a new deal—you stabbed him with the hatpin you wore. You cleaned it, and left it on the bureau to make us think it was a love affair and an outside job. For that reason you didn't take his stuff.

"You couldn't light out on the minute, but you made a good excuse. But, Stevie, boy, I know that outside jobs aren' pulled off that way. If skeletons had been used, more than one room would have been robbed. If Boyd's door had been accidentally open, Boyd would have been asleep, and you know that he wasn't stabbed while lying or even sitting down. And, Stevie, wronged women don't leave behind something to trace them by. You overshot yourself by cleaning the hatpin. That showed that it had been left deliberately, not merely in forgetfulness.

"Now, it so happened that a dirty little bell boy unconsciously helped you by helping himself. That baffled us for a while, for it looked like robbery, too. But I know bell boys. You made a big mistake by not taking Red's watch. That first put me on your trail. You didn't know, maybe, but it was the one he got in the Chicago robbery. He could dispose of the rest of the stuff, but he was afraid of the number the watch carried. But I remembered the case and movement numbers.

"Then, the murderer was left-handed, for the wound was on the right side—not the left, as it should have been if the murderer was right-handed. The strength of the blow could only have come from a man. At first I suspected Buttons, but when he couldn't lift a heavy chair he couldn't drive that hatpin up to the hilt in solid muscle. Still, there it was—a woman's. So, from the watch, I knew that Boyd must be Big Red. Also that you had broken jail and that you might very well be the man we wanted.

"I knew your reputation, and so I put it down that you were Mrs. Hammond. Everything pointed that way. I watched you as you paid your bill at the desk. You used your left hand exclusively, and you carried your purse in a satchel, because men, however clever, cannot always find a woman's pocket; eh, Stevie? I was dead sure of you, and I guess you know the rest. I'm merely pointing out the mistakes you made—for you'll never make another."

"Clever," sneered the felon, his mouth working. "But I'll square you yet, if I have to break a hundred jails. See if I don't. You'll get Red's dose, all right."

"Thanks," laughed Jimmie. "But there's the patrol wagon, I think, at the door, so you'll have to wait indefinitely. I'm willing."

Such was my night with Lisping Jimmie. It was proof of his contention that one crime, if followed far enough back, will lead you to another. And subsequent events have rather inclined me to this belief.

THE CAT'S-PAW.

By J. ARMSTRONG SAYRE.

"Wanted—An Englishman of good family and irreproachable past to act as private secretary to a capitalist. Must be a fluent linguist, of good appearance and manners. Experience unnecessary."

The address appended was a suite of rooms in the Waldorf-Astoria.

I had left England because I knew too many people to be able to make a living. In the United States, no one knew me, and I had obtained a situation in a broker's office, and was designated as margin clerk. I had been there for nearly six months, barely living on the scanty wages paid me, and this advertisement looked like a special message to me.

I called that morning, and the boy took in my card to Mr. Felton. He received me in a well-appointed little reception room, and, after a few questions, engaged me for the position.

"There is only one question left to settle," he said, "and that is the one of salary. I will not pay more than two hundred dollars a month, over and above your expenses. Is that satisfactory?"

Was it? Rather! I had been making just one-fifth of that. The latter I did not tell him, but the first I did.

"Well, then, that is fixed. I shall want you to travel. You have no ties here?"

"None," I replied. "And I should prefer traveling."

He arose, put his hand in his pocket, and drew out a mass of notes. He selected four fifty-dollar bills and thrust them into my hand.

"Go out and buy yourself a complete set of new clothes. Evening dress, dinner coat, morning suit, frock coat, and all the other things. One of the points I wish to impress on you is this: You must be as well dressed as any man you are liable to see."

I glanced at his rather ill-fitting broadcloth. He interpreted the glance and laughed.

"Oh! that's all right," he said. "It makes no difference how a millionaire dresses. With his secretary it is different. Besides, I am not hiring you so much for use as for ornament and as a protection for my daughter—you understand?"

I did not.

"Order the clothes and have them sent in as soon as possible. To-morrow you must purchase tickets for Havre, for we must be in Paris within two weeks' time. I have some important business there."

I murmured that it should be done.

"When you have ordered the clothes, have your bags and boxes sent to the hotel. I have engaged a room and bath for you adjoining our apartment."

I smiled when I remembered the one little box that remained of my former array of luggage. He was very keen in seeing things, and understood what I meant by the smile.

"Order some trunks, too," he said. "And anything else you think necessary. Have them sent C. O. D. I will pay."

I stumbled out of the apartment, wondering whether I were awake. When I had regained the street and was walking toward Broadway, it suddenly dawned on me that, in spite of his liberality, I did not like Mr. Felton. There was something shifty about his eye, and cruel about the corner of his mouth, that impressed me with distinct disfavor.

However, as the old saw runs, a poor man does not look a gift horse in the mouth, and the fact that I was able once more to go into a tailor's shop and order good clothes—for I knew how to do that—made me bless the generous Mr. Felton. I walked out of the tailoring establishment after having ordered every variety of clothes, and the salesman—who was evidently from the old Kent Road—bowed almost as low as the Chinese do when they kotow. He also addressed me as "me lud."

How gratifying it is to have money! This may appear trite, but there are no other words to express my feelings at that moment. Finally, after buying other necessaries and putting them in the cab, I drove to my little room on West Nineteenth Street, and packed my things. Then, jumping into the cab again, I drove to the Waldorf.

I reported to Felton, who told me that I would be expected to knock at six-thirty and to accompany them to the palm room for dinner. The rest of the evening I spent arranging my new purchases and gloating over my luck.

At the time appointed I knocked on the door of the Felton apartment, and Felton himself admitted me. On my entrance, a tall, slim girl with very blue eyes and a wealth of straw-colored hair, arose from her chair, and Felton presented me to her as his daughter Page. We chatted together for a few moments, and then went down for dinner.

To say the very least for her, Page Felton was beautiful. Her eyes had in them a thousand different expressions, and her hair was like a crown of glory. She had an adorable smile, and little, even teeth, and her manner had no condescension in it, none of that master to servant manner which I had more than expected the daughter of a man so coarse as Felton would use.

I accompanied her to the theater that evening, at her own request, her father pleading business and excusing himself. Fortunately, I was wearing my dress clothes—or what was left of them—and so did not feel out of place in the very conspicuous location for which the tickets called—the upper right-hand box. Miss Felton, however, seemed to see no one, and was apparently unaware that all the women, and a great many of the men, possessed of opera glasses, were gazing at her fresh young beauty, so becomingly arrayed in a dinner gown of palest pink.

She was very gracious to me, and before I left her that night she held out her little hand to me and said that she hoped we would be good friends. Then I did a silly thing; I kissed her hand. I expected her to grow very angry, but she only blushed a little, and said "Good night" very softly. Then I went to my room, and dreamed the usual foolish dreams that a man has when he imagines himself in love.

The next morning at nine, I went into the Feltons' reception room, and Felton gave me the money with which to purchase the tickets to Havre. I went down to the office of the steamship line and reserved two stateroom cabins, one for Miss Felton, and the other for her father and myself, according to his orders. I was informed that the *Campagna* would sail in two days, and so told my employer.

"Your work won't begin until we get to Paris," he said. "And Page wants you to go horseback riding with her in Central Park this afternoon. Can you ride?"

Could I? I, Mortimer Thrynne, who had once been the best cross-country rider in Sussex! And with her! My heart beat wildly. It was evident that she was not offended with me for my foolish action of the night before.

Well, I rode with her in the park, and I took her to the theater again that night, and after that to a little supper at Sherry's—all by her own command and with her father's consent. He seemed to place great trust in me, and I consequently did not repeat my action of the first night when I left her at her door.

My clothes came, and I packed them, just in time to catch the *Campagna*. We went aboard at one o'clock, and the Statue of Liberty soon faded in the distance.

There were a great many notables aboard; Jerningham, son of the Earl of Oxminster; Manville Granton, the tragic actor; Hobart Brune, the author, and numbers of others, more or less well known. There were also quite a few pretty women, one, Hila Arthur, the celebrated actress; but Miss Felton was easily the most attractive of all. I noticed a number of the men look longingly in her direction, and I congratulated myself that they did not know her. After she had gone below, I went into the smoke room, and I noticed that the men were inclined to make my acquaintance. The next day, the ones with whom I had exchanged cards came up while I was talking to her, and I was forced to introduce them. But I noticed that her manner toward them was distant, and that she turned to me every other moment as though she were warning them that she could find quite enough occupation in my own person. Even Jerningham—silly ass!—failed to attract her. Which was wonderful, considering that she was an American girl, and he the heir to one of the oldest titles in England.

On the third day out, I could stand the suspense no longer, and I went to her father, my heart almost in my mouth.

"I am very sorry, Mr. Felton," I said, drawing him off to a secluded portion of the deck. "But I am afraid your kindness has been wasted on me, and I shall be forced to tender my resignation."

"What the devil for?" he asked angrily.

I explained all in a tremble. He laughed.

"Well, what do you come to me for? If Page cares anything for you, she'll have you. She has always had everything that she's wanted since she's been a baby."

"But I am penniless. I cannot support a wife," I said bitterly.

He eyed me with great shrewdness. "If Page wants you that won't make any difference to me. I need a right-hand man—and——"

He lighted a cigar. "You'd better go and talk to her," he said, and moved off.

After dinner that night, under a clear, moonlit sky, we sat on the forward part of the boat deck, and I finally managed to stammer out the words. I will not dwell on this. Suffice to say that at the time I thought earth could hold no greater happiness for me.

Later, hand in hand, we told her father, and he asked her to go to her room. Then he looked at me gravely.

"I like you, Thrynne," he said slowly. "And I know you'd make Page a good husband. But there is one thing you must know before you marry her. It is her one weakness, her one failing. In spite of the fact that I have enough money to buy her anything she expresses a desire to have, she is unable to conquer herself—she is a kleptomaniac."

The words sounded absurd when applied to the possessor of that sweet, girlish face.

"It is true," he said seriously. "You will find it out soon enough."

I said that nothing could make any difference in my love for her.

* * * * * * *

We had been in Paris for three days, and I had done nothing except take Page to Chantilly and for rides along the Bois Boulogne. One night we went to the Comédie Français, one day to the Louvre and the Luxembourg. We had planned to make the trip to Versailles the following day, when Page suddenly changed her mind.

"I saw some beautiful pearls in a shop on the Boulevard Haussman to-day," she informed her father, at dinner. "I am going to buy them to-morrow."

I saw his face go suddenly white—or appear to—and a frightened look came into his eyes. He tried to urge her out of the project, but she stamped her little foot and was firm. The following morning, at breakfast, she repeated her former assertion and asked him for money. He handed her a roll of ten-franc notes. After breakfast, he called me into the adjoining room.

"It's begun," he said brokenly. "She will take everything she lays her hands on. You will have to save her, my boy. Here—take this." He handed me a large packet of bills. "There are fifty thousand dollars' worth there. Use what is necessary. You will go after her, and ask the amount of what she has taken. Explain the unfortunate circumstance, and pay the full value of whatever she conceals."

It was rather a staggering thing to ask a man to do, but for Page I would have done anything in the world—and he knew it. So I took the bills, and when Page was ready, we told the cocher the number on the Boul' Haussman, and were driven there.

While she was examining the pearls, I drew the manager aside and explained to him. He laughed, and said it was not a new thing. They sold a great many goods in that peculiar way. So I watched Page. She was certainly clever, and the things she laid her hands on disappeared like magic. It was a sickening thing for a lover to watch, but I knew it was more of a disease than a criminal instinct, and I could forgive her where I might have shunned another person for the same action. She paid for the trifles she purchased, sweetly and innocently, and for the things she purloined I paid after she left the shop.

We visited about six in this fashion, and my pockets were fast bulging with French notes and change, but the American bills were disappearing rapidly. In five hours, she had taken, altogether, forty-three thousand five hundred and sixty-two dollars' worth of jewelry.

We drove back to the hotel, and her father met me with a troubled face.

"Mortimer," he said, "you will have to make a quick trip to London to-night. Catch the Calais express, and make the Channel boat to Dover."

"Why?" I asked wonderingly.

He handed me a letter addressed: "John Melville Carton, Hotel Carlton, London, England. Courtesy of Mr. Mortimer Thrynne."

I stared at it. "That letter is too valuable to trust to the post," he said shortly. "And it must be in Carton's hands to-morrow at ten. So hurry, pack your things, and catch the train."

Very much bewildered, I ran to my room, crammed some things into a portmanteau, and, seizing my raincoat and umbrella, came back.

"If Carton isn't at the hotel, break open the letter and read the contents," continued Felton. "They will tell you how to act."

I handed him what was left of the fifty thousand dollars. He crammed the notes into his pocket, and, reaching into another, handed me a neat packet of English bank notes. "Those will serve, I think," he said. "Good-by."

Page put her arms around me, and I kissed her. Then I tumbled into the cab, and told the cabby to make speed for the station.

* * * * * * *

Mr. John Melville Carton was not at the hotel, nor had any one there ever heard of him. Consequently, I opened the letter. This is what I read:

"Dear Thrynne: Excuse me for sending you on a fool errand, but it was absolutely necessary to get you out of the way. Page is not a kleptomaniac, nor I a millionaire. On the other hand, we are both very clever counterfeiters, and the forty-three thousand dollars you expended yesterday was all made by me, and, consequently, false money.

"Also: Page is not my daughter. She is my wife.

"I write this in order that you can show it to the police in case there is any trouble about your passing off the notes. The police will, no doubt, scent it sooner or later. I hope you will not be implicated.

"Page and I are going to a place where there are no extradition laws, so consequently we are safe.

"Better luck next time.

"Sincerely.

"Charles T. Felton.

"Paris, August 8th."

A PRECAUTIONARY MEASURE.

A certain country minister was the owner of a swift and spirited horse. On one occasion, while he was driving through the village, he overtook the local physician on foot.

"Jump in, doctor," he said, pulling up. "I've got a horse here that goes pretty well."

The doctor jumped in and the parson drove off. The horse did go well, in the sense of speed, but in a little while it began to behave badly, and ended by tipping over the carriage and spilling out both the occupants. The doctor jumped to his feet and felt himself all over to see if he was injured. The parson also got to his feet.

"Look here," exclaimed the doctor, "what do you mean by inviting me to ride behind a horse like that?"

"Well, you see," gasped the parson, "luckily this time there are no bones broken, but I always like to have a doctor with me when I drive that animal."

The Man With the Thumb.

By GEORGE PARSONS BRADFORD.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Dick Tarrion, a young man out of employment, while looking over the want columns of a newspaper, is accosted by a man whom he knows only as a frequenter of the cheap restaurant where Dick has been in the habit of taking his breakfasts, and whom Dick has named "Gray Eyes." The man calls Dick's attention to an advertisement for a close-mouthed gentleman, willing to travel, cool, and having had no experience in the insurance business. Dick applies for the position by letter, and is directed to call up "Twenty-o-ten, Chelsea" on the telephone. As he does so he overhears a conversation on the wire. One speaker says that he will make Richard Tarrion wish he had never been born. Dick is engaged over the telephone, in a mysterious manner, and is directed to report to Mr. Horton, president of the Mortimer Trust Company, who tells him that at the expiration of five weeks he will receive a check for one thousand dollars for his services. He is supplied with a railway ticket to Cincinnati and two hundred dollars in currency, but the nature of the work he is to perform remains a mystery. He is told, however, that when his train reaches Altoona, at night, further instructions will be given in a letter which will be placed in his sleeping berth by a man named Michaels. He is also requested to change his name from Tarrion to Trent. When the train reaches Altoona, he sees that Michaels is none other than "Gray Eyes." The letter given to him reveals the fact that Michaels was a collegemate of Dick's. It also directs Dick to go to a little village named Roan's, at the foot of Roan Mountain, in Kentucky, and there get the thumb print of a man whose photograph is inclosed in the letter. Dick hurls from the train and over a bridge a pretended commercial traveler who tries to get from him the letter he received from Michaels. Riding on horseback to Roan's, Dick passes a powerfully built young man who is talking with a pretty girl. Later he finds this man being shot at by three mountaineers. Dick opens fire on the three, who make off. The young fellow explains he is Lang McComb, and that his assailants are Wades, with whom the McCombs have long been engaged in a feud. Dick, arriving at Roan's, becomes friendly with a storekeeper named Quake. Quake warns him that the Wades will attack him. He learns that Ed Wade is engaged to Bess Roan, the beautiful girl to whom he saw Lang McComb talking at the roadside, and that Bess really is in love with Lang. She is the daughter of Major Roan, who is supposed to be descended from a powerful European family. Bess comes to Quake's to warn Dick that Ed Wade is on his way to kill him. Lang appears and, with Quake and Dick, opens fire on the Wades. Lang and Dick get to their horses and make off. Dick is wounded and taken to the McComb homestead, where he recovers. He gets the idea that Major Roan is the man whose thumb print he is to obtain, and then starts for Badalia, the home of the Roans. He comes to a house which he believes to be Roan's, and there finds Ed Wade on the porch.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE POLTROON.

He frightened me—positively—by the great bulk of him. The man was a physical giant. Lang McComb was a big man, but Ed Wade was as tall as Lang and twice as broad and deep, it seemed. As for me, he would have made two Dick Tarrions. And yet, for all his flesh and greatness, he was not unwieldy; he handled his body well, carrying himself with a grace that gave one the impression of a man never to be caught napping.

It remained to be determined whether or no he was a giant in intellect as well as in build. It was for me to match my subtlety against his cunning in a game whose stakes were mighty high—for me, at least, whose life was included. And, realizing this, I stood confused at the outset, lacking the straight-sounding answer which his plain, straightforward question demanded.

Casting about for some reply, I seized upon the primal thought that was in my mind, and—told the truth!

"My business," I stammered confusedly, "it's—it's—I wished to see you concerning Major Roan!"

"What!" He brought the ejaculation out like the report of a pistol shot. He walked down to the edge of the porch, and stood glowering at me until I felt that I wilted under that penetrating glare. Finally:

"Majah Roan's been dead these two yeahs," he observed quietly.

"I know it," I agreed, steeling myself. "But he left a daughter, I believe?"

"Yes, suh. What of that?"

Then I began to lie desperately; for I knew not what else to do.

"My name," I said, "is Richards. I am the son of one of Major Roan's old friends—a resident of Lexington. My father recently died leaving me his property; but in his will he directed that all his debts should be paid, and I find in a schedule of them that he owed Major Roan several thousand dollars. This naturally belongs to his daughter, and I wish to settle with her."

"Come inside."

Wade made the remark suddenly and sharply, and, after a considering pause, turned on his heel and entered the house, I swallowed my heart and followed, congratulating myself on the ready credence he had given my tale, comforting myself with the thought that, should worse come to worst and I be discovered, we were at least man to man—and that there was in the side pocket of my coat the heavy, reassuring weight of a built-for-business forty-four.

He led the way into a dining room—evidently; a room in the front of the house, at one side of the central hall, somewhat better furnished than my previous experience had led me to expect to find in these mountains.

I found time to wonder at the taste displayed while Wade was lighting a kerosene lantern. He placed it in a bracket, so that the reflector threw a strong light upon me as I sat in the chair which he politely insisted was the easiest in the room. For Wade's part, he remained standing before an open fireplace, hands behind his back, his head pugnaciously forward, two little, sinister, black eyes fixed steadily upon mine.

"Ye say ye come fr'm Lexington?" he inquired pleasantly. "Right smart of a journey, suh. Did ye come fr'm Nazareth, or Milan ways?"

"From Milan," I lied more confidently, now that the habit was growing upon me; "I just got in this evening."

"An' ye hed to walk? That's sholy too bad, suh. Lemme mix a toddy. Tek off yo' coat, an' mek yo'self comfortable. Why, ye must be worn to a frazzle, walkin' so fer."

"I'm quite comfortable, thank you," I lied again; for I was uneasy now, vaguely alarmed by the mocking something which I fancied I detected in his tone. "I don't much care to drink. After business is over, perhaps—— Is Miss Roan about?"

I was desperately determined to brazen it out. Also, I was scared and confused. There were several things, indeed, which were beyond my comprehension. For one —why was Ed Wade here, when his men were attacking the McCombs?

I fancied something menacing in his attitude toward me, nor was I satisfied with the intangible explanation that in referring to Major Roan I touched upon some tender spot. Had Quake proven false to me, warned Wade of my coming? Had I been watched by Wade spies that afternoon?

Was I in a trap?

"Miss Roan?" he repeated. "Why, yes, suh; I s'pose she oughter be somewhar 'round."

He had turned to a cupboard with his offer of a drink, and had taken from it a bottle of whisky. This he fondled as he stood, smiling slightly.

"I'd like to see her," I blundered on. "Of course, I want to settle up, and get back as soon as I can."

"Umm—yes. I'll call her—— Mought I ask, Mistah Richards, how you knew enough to come to me foh Miss Roan?"

"Why—the storekeeper at Milan told me that—that you might know."

His arm moved swiftly. I saw the missile coming, out of the tail of my eye, and I dodged, but not quickly enough. He had thrown the whisky bottle at my head —thrown it with exceeding swiftness and unerring aim. Despite my warning I could not evade it. I was struck a heavy, glancing blow on the temple, knocked from the chair, half stunned and just able to see.

Wade laughed aloud gloathingly.

"Yo' picayune ass!" he cried scornfully. "What kind of a fool d'ye think I am—to walk into my hands with yo' lies, when I know well enough thar ain't no evenin' train into Milan!"

He considered me, stroking his chin. I lay still, scarce daring to breathe, knowing that my only chance lay in making him believe that I was unconscious; but I watched through half-closed eyes.

"I reckon," he continued, "ye must be this hyeh Mistah Tarrion thet's been raising ructions. Waal, I calculate to settle with ye, Tarrion."

He reached down into the leg of his boot. When his hand came out it held his revolver—but held it a second too late. In that instant I had taken heart, and had drawn and covered him with my hammerless.

"Just drop that gun!" I besought him.

He gaped at me blankly, the triumphant sneer fading from his face. His hand opened nervously and his weapon fell to the floor.

I watched him with growing amazement, as he gazed as one fascinated into the muzzle of my gun. His thick, sensual lips were trembling; his face, that had been red-hued, now ashen-green; his eyes were glinting like hard stones struck by fear, throwing off spark of pure terror; his fingers twitched, and the whole frame of him vibrated weakly, as a stricken thing, invertebrate.

The sight of him thus made my gorge rise. It was horrible, monstrous, a pitiful exhibition—and it was the explanation of his absence from the work of the night.

Ed Wade was a coward!

"Don't shoot," he whimpered weakly. "Please, suh, don't shoot! Aw, fo' Gawd's sake, suh——"

"Oh, shut up!" I snapped, sickened.

But he whined on, abject, cringing, fawning, begging me to have mercy upon him, to spare his worthless carcass —until finally I had to silence him with the threat direct.

At the muzzle of the revolver, I backed him into a corner, as distant as possible from either door of the room. I placed myself over against the outer doorway, facing him, at my ease in a chair. And then, by dint of threats made potent by the weapon I kept trained upon him, I made him answer.

"You called me Tarrion just now," I said. "Now, how did you know that was my name?"

"I—uh—I——" he stammered, unable to keep his eyes from the revolver.

"Did you ever," I continued, "use a telephone?"

"Why, suh! What d'ye mean, suh?"

"I mean this: Did you ever tell anybody, over a telephone wire, that if he came out here, when you 'got through with Mr. Tarrion, he'd wish he'd never been born'?"

I thought the craven's eyes would start from their sockets. But by then I had recognized his voice, was fairly sure of him.

"And then," I continued gloatingly, "some one interrupted you, and told you not to be too sure? Remember that? I was the fellow who was so rude."

"You, suh?"

Still he stared blankly. But his simulated incomprehension failed to deceive me. I felt that I had put my finger on the button of this mystery. I was putting two and two together.

Now, I was assured, I was come to the end of my search; and, as surely, I felt that the man I had been sent to seek was Major Roan, and that Wade knew where the major was.

"Where," I demanded suddenly, and as fiercely as I could, "is Major Roan?"

He gripped his fat fingers together.

"Dead, suh," he whispered hoarsely.

I raised the revolver.

"Where—is—Major—Roan?"

"Oh—suh. Oh, oh, don't, suh! I'll take ye to him, suh! I will, indeed, suh! I promise—— Oh, please, suh——"

"Then he isn't dead?"

"No, suh; indeed he isn't, suh. He's jist pretendin' to be dead, suh!"

"Very well. How long will it take you to get me to him?"

"Ten minutes, suh—not moah, suh!"

"Good!—— Hello!"

The crack of a rifle shot had come to my ears—short, sharp at hand. Others followed it. I rose uneasily, and walked to the window—careful, however, to keep an eye on Wade.

Before the house the valley lay a well of darkness. But at the farther side—as nearly as I might judge, at the crossroads where stood Quake's store—a pillar of flame was leaping skyward, tossing aloft great clouds of ruddy smoke, huge constellations of sparks for the night wind to carry Milanward.

I had forgotten, absorbed in the excitement of my adventure, the work that was doing in Roan's that night. Now, bitterly indignant as this was brought home to me, and I realized what the flames meant, I swore aloud.

"The devil!" I cried.

"What is it, suh?" Wade demanded eagerly.

"Quake's store is being burned!" I told him. "The work of your men, you cur!"

He said something exultantly toned, but I did not hear it well. My ears were filled with the thunder of hoofs caused by a body of horsemen dashing up the road from Quake's—and already perilously near Badalia.

Wade's men, I deduced, were returning, having triumphed over the McComb forces, having carried fire and death to Roan's. If this were so, it behooved me to escape. And I dared not leave Wade behind.

I leaned out of the window, striving to judge by my hearing of the nearness of the horsemen.

In that moment Wade was upon my shoulders—like a huge, crafty, cowardly cat that strikes when its prey is unaware of danger.

He got me to the floor. Fortunately, my revolver had dropped out of the window; and, despite my weakness, I managed to keep him too busy to find his own. We fought the round of the room, rolling, biting, scratching—fought like animals, indeed; for Wade was the larger and the stronger, I the more desperate, reading my death warrant in every individual note of the clattering hoofs that neared us.

Abruptly the man jerked himself away, and I was free—free to lie limp and exhausted upon the floor, free to watch him as he ran about the room, terrorized again, seeking an exit which, when found, he feared to take, while from without came the stamping of suddenly halted horses and cries, loud and imperative for:

"Wade! Ed Wade! Come out of that, you——"

One voice I knew. It was McComb's—Lang's. And then I understood that Wade's gang had been defeated, that all was well with me. And I watched the wretched creature curiously as he circled the wall aimlessly, dazedly, like a mouse in a trap.

Feet rang upon the veranda, in the hallway. Wade, screaming, made a desperate dash for the rear doorway. A flash of flame met him at its threshold, and he slumped back heavily to the floor, groaning, pleading, begging for mercy—mortally wounded.

There entered, upon that instant, Beth Roan, Lang McComb, Quake, a dozen of McComb's men, and—of all men—Peter Michaels, "Gray Eyes!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE PRINT OF A THUMB.

Michaels says that when I saw him I yelped just one remark, and slid off into unconsciousness. I expect that that's about right; for, without my knowing it at the time, my wound had been reopened by my struggle with Ed Wade, and the consequent loss of blood had knocked from under me the props of strength.

At any rate, I woke up the next day, back in the little room in the McComb homestead. Michaels himself was sitting by the window. I murmured something, and he looked up.

"Howdy, fire eater," he said. "Thought you'd wake up in time to assist at the ceremony, did you?"

"What ceremony?" I said weakly.

"Marriage ceremony, sir; Miss Elizabeth Roan is to be married to Lang McComb at three this afternoon."

"Say," I pleaded, "tell me all about it, Michaels. If you don't, right now, I'll talk a blue streak, and myself into a fever."

"That's a go," he assented. "After you've had something to eat, it won't do you a bit of harm to have your eyes opened. Fact of the matter is, I think you'd be more likely to shuffle off because of suppressed curiosity than for any other reason. But you have to eat first."

I agreed to that, and Beth and Mrs. McComb came in and fed me—spoon victuals, as if I had been a baby. And then I lay back, and bade Michaels fire away.

"I'm going to begin at the beginning, Tarrion," said he; "way back, twenty years ago, when you and I were tadding around in little Russian blouses, or whatever kids wore in those days; at any rate, long before either of us ever dreamed that there was such a place as Sinful Creek Valley on the map of the globe.

"Major Randolph J. Roan then owned about all this neighborhood. He was a Southerner of the old school—and is now, by the way, but broken. He married in his middle age, and his young wife died at the birth of their only child, Elizabeth.

"From that time on, Major Roan seemed demoralized, without backbone or moral conscience. He went downhill like a bowlder down a mountainside. The most of his time he spent in the blue-grass region of this State, risking his money on the ponies—and losing it; risking it on cards and the red and black—and losing it; helping to support the numerous distilleries of the country—in a word, going to the demnition kioodles.

"Beth—Elizabeth—Miss Roan, I should say—was left up here in charge of the Wades, old tenants of the Roan's estates. She grew up a half-wild thing of the mountains, for the most part; although it is true that for a time the major put up for her education at one of the convent schools in the blue grass. There she learned the rudiments and a little more. For one thing, I happen to know, she speaks French like a native of Paris—that's convent training for you, Tarrion.

"But the major's money gave out too soon; Beth was taken from the convent and brought back here, a ward of the Wades again. The major himself returned, and staved off ruin for a while by securing the appointment as postmaster at Milan. But that didn't last long; the salary of a fourth-class post office can't keep a man in expensive cigars and pay gaming debts. The major got awfully hard up.

"That was about four years ago—maybe three. And the devil came and whispered in Major Roan's ear—the devil in the shape of a card sharper he had known in Lexington. This man had run down on his luck, and become associated with a gang of New York swindlers, whose specialty was the perpetration of insurance frauds.

"It seemed easy, plausible, feasible—swindling an insurance company. The major, demoralized and needing money the worst way in the world, became an easy victim. At the suggestion of his swindling acquaintance, he went down into Lexington and offered himself to the companies. He was in fairly good health, and found no difficulty in persuading the companies to take the risk on his life to the extent of about two hundred thousand dollars—the premiums for which, of course, were to be put up, without the companies' knowledge, by the New York swindling syndicate, who were to get one-half of the swag when the trick was finally turned. The other half was to go to the major. In order to make everything seem straight, his daughter Beth was named as beneficiary under the various policies.

"But Beth was no party to the swindle; she didn't, in the least, suspect the major was carrying any insurance at all.

"Well—the major waited a decent interval after the issuance of the policies—about six months—and then went on a fishing trip, up the mountains. Ed Wade and the gambler accompanied him. When they returned, a week or so later, they bore with them a coffin said to contain the body of Major Randolph J. Roan.

"The insurance companies were notified. Their representatives came down here, and had the coffin opened, and the remains identified by several leading citizens—Wade the most prominent, some of his tools testifying also. Miss Roan did not testify; she was prostrated by the shock of her father's death, unable to leave her bed.

"But everything seemed straight, and the policies were about to be paid, when a rumor was noised about the neighborhood—a rumor that the major's ghost had been seen in Badalia. The companies heard of it. Now, it is a mighty tough job to get a skeptical insurance corporation to believe in a specter of one of their policy holders. They decided to investigate, and held up the payment of the policies.

"This is where I come upon the scene, Tarrion. I am, and have been for years, an adjuster for the Occidental Mutual Life, of New York, which had underwritten the major's life to the tune of eighty thousand dollars. I was sent here to investigate and report.

"Wade received me with open arms; but I mistrusted him. Nevertheless, I accepted his hospitality, and remained at his house in Badalia—which used to be Major Roan's, by the way—while I was snooping around. From the first, the thing smelled fishy to me. And then, suddenly one night, a gang of mountaineers surrounded the house, denounced me as a revenue inspector on the lookout for illicit stills, and ran me out of the valley in my nightshirt—most embarrassing.

"Another man was sent here—Morrisey, of the North River Tontine Company. Morrisey met Wade—and just evaporated. He's never been heard of since.

"Then things began to look worse than ever. Calhoun, New York manager for the Occidental, called me into conference. He wanted me to come back; I didn't think it would be healthy for me to do so.

"We had quite a long talk. Finally it was decided to send into the valley a man who knew nothing of the precise nature of his business—a man of discretion with a plausible errand, such as bird hunting, who should know no more about his work than that he was to find a certain man. Then, if accused of being in the employ of the insurance concerns, he couldn't even look conscious; he could deny the charge with a clear conscience, for he knew no better.

"Obviously, such a chap would stand a better chance of winning out than any one known to be in the pay of an insurance concern.

"About that time I was running a case to earth on the West Side in New York. I was half disguised as a rowdyish sort of a water-front character, and used to patronize a cheap restaurant on Reade Street, and there, in the mornings, I would frequently meet up with an old school chum of mine—a fellow named Tarrion, who seemed pretty hard up. I fixed on Tarrion for our man, inasmuch as I knew him to be true metal to the backbone.

"That advertisement to which I called your attention, Tarrion, was gotten up especially for your benefit; we got a lot of other answers, but yours was the only one replied to. And that scheme of having you call up was also arranged especially for the purpose of keeping you in the dark, although we fondly fancied that would also serve to keep the New York gang of swindlers from spotting you.

"It failed—in this way: You remember the short, stout man who chased you all over the streets of New York, the morning you received your commission? Well, he was the same chap who called up Mort Wade, brother of Ed, who was in Philadelphia that night, waiting to get news, when you blundered onto their wire in some mysterious fashion——"

"Hold on, Michaels," I interrupted; "this is all very interesting, and I don't want to bother you, but will you be kind enough to explain how you knew about the stout spy, and about my running in on the telephone message?"

"That's simple enough," he went on. "Be quiet and listen.

"We rounded up Mr. Stoutman—whose name is Rickett, by the way—in Cleveland, day before yesterday, in reference to another case entirely. He was the head of the gang, whose operations were widespread, embracing the whole Eastern section of the United States.

"I was instrumental in Rickett's apprehension, and assisted the Cleveland police in putting him through the third degree. When he found that we had him, hard and fast, he decided to turn State's evidence, and try to get a lighter term in the pen by confessing, and implicating all his pals.

"Among other affairs, he shed a whole lot of light on this episode.

"It seems that—as we had surmised—Ed Wade had helped to hide Major Roan in the mountains. After a while he began to cast the eye matrimonial on Beth Roan, with the additional consideration that he, Ed Wade, could use her share of the insurance, two hundred thousand dollars, in his business. He promptly made Roan his personal prisoner, told Beth the gist of the whole affair, and threatened her that, if she refused to marry him, he would kill her father. In such case, the girl had but one duty; to sacrifice herself and her love for Lang McComb to the saving of her parent's life.

"He got his brother, Mort Wade, into the scheme. Of course they were in constant communication with the New York gang—with Rickett. At the proper time they received word that a third insurance inspector was on the verge of coming out, secretly this time. Ed and Mort went to Philadelphia, in order to be near the starting point, and to cripple or exterminate you before you got far on your way.

"Rickett was watching us more closely than we imagined. Calhoun and I were accustomed to hold our confabulations in my boarding house. Rickett, under another name, had the room next to mine, and by the simple expedient of boring a hole through the wall was enabled to keep tabs on us. He found out that you were the bird, and immediately telephoned the Wades in Philadelphia. When you interrupted, they didn't know what to make of it; but I, by comparing the time of the calls, and interviewing the operator on duty at central that night, found that the party who had called for twenty-o-ten Chelsea had accidentally been switched onto long distance.

"That meant you, of course.

"Well—Ed Wade left Mort to take the sleeper in Philadelphia, and attend to you. I guess you know what happened to Mort. They found his body a few days later—after you'd thrown him from the train—at the bottom of the ravine. You managed to get yourself into Wade's bad graces on several important counts, you see.

"When Rickett confessed, I lost no time in taking a train down here. I came into the valley by way of Nazareth, rather than from Milan, and I brought with me ten United States deputy sheriffs. We rode direct to McComb's, intending to enlist his services—got there about an hour after you had ridden off yesterday afternoon. By the time we had explained things, old man Quake came into camp, so to speak, with his story of Wade's contemplated revenge and of your scatter-brained expedition into Badalia.

"Lang sent out a hurry call to his allies, and we—McComb and his men, and I with my deputy sheriffs—lay in wait for the Wade gang and their men from Breathitt County. Somehow I don't believe that there was ever a more surprised and indignant body of cutthroats on the face of the earth than that murderous deputation. They lit down upon the McComb homestead about eleven last night, and in just about two minutes by the clock they were all in the air. Most of them never knew what hit them. A few got away.

"We chased them down the road, and cornered them in Quake's store. They made a fight for it there, and set fire to the place, but we gathered them all in, and came on over to get Wade.

"We surrounded the house. When I waltzed into the front door, Lang McComb was attending to the rear entrance. Wade tried to get by him, and was mortally wounded. You, Tarrion, cast your eyes up to me with a glad, not to say joyous, expression, cried, 'There's your man, Michaels! He knows where Roan is!' and keeled over in a dead faint.

"We pumped Ed Wade. At first I thought he was more scared than hurt, but we forced a confession from him; he told us where we could find Roan in an abandoned hut a mile or so back in the hills, cursed you with melodramatic fervor, and died.

"Which ends the McComb-Wade feud for all time, by the way.

"Lang went up into the mountains, and got back this morning with Major Roan—alive, but downcast. He has perked up a bit by now, and is going to give his daughter away at the wedding this afternoon—the old scoundrel!

"I think that's about all."

"Not quite," said I. "You haven't explained about the thumb print. I don't follow you there."

"That," said Michaels cheerfully, "is dead easy, my son.

"Major Roan, when signing his applications for insurance, was mighty nervous. In some way he managed to smear the ball of his thumb with ink, and left the print of it on the edge of the application to our company, the Occidental.

"Now, you know an insurance company doesn't pay the face of a policy, except upon absolute proof of death. But we almost had that. I'm told that the body in the coffin—that of a mountaineer who died just at the right time—resembled Major Roan to a remarkable degree.

"The sole thing we could bring forward as positive proof that the major was alive was a second imprint of his thumb, taken from the hand of a living man. We instructed you to get a photograph of him, but that would hardly be legal evidence; supported by the thumb print, however, it would have been absolute, irrefutable.

"But that won't be necessary now. Fraud's proven, anyway. How do you feel, old man? Strong enough to get up and come downstairs for the festivities?"

"I don't know——"

I lay still, looking out of the window. Golden sunlight bathed a view of the valley; the land basked in a shimmer of heat. Without bees droned, horses pawed in the dusty roadside, dogs barked—Beth called aloud to Lang, her voice thrilling with ineffable happiness.

I raised myself upon my elbow, reaching for my clothing.

"Yes," I panted, "I'll be in at—at the wedding. But, Michaels——"

"Well?"

"For God's mercy, get me away from here to-day! I don't think I can stand it—to know that she—— I don't begrudge Lang his good fortune, but——"

I broke down. Michaels put his hand upon my shoulder. When he spoke it was in a tone of infinite compassion.

"Lies the land that way, old man?" he said softly. "I'm downright sorry, Tarrion."

WHAT HE DID WITH THEM.

The queen of Denmark once paid a visit to the Danish colony of Iceland, where the good old bishop exerted himself to the utmost to show her everything that was worth seeing. The queen paid many compliments to her host, and, having learned that he was a family man, graciously inquired how many children he had. It happens that the Danish word for "children" is almost identical in sound with the Icelandic word for "sheep"; so the worthy bishop—whose knowledge of Danish was not so complete as it might have been—understood her majesty to ask how many sheep he owned, and promptly answered:

"Two hundred."

"Two hundred children!" cried the queen, astounded. "How can you possibly maintain such a number?"

"Easily enough, please your majesty," replied the prelate, with a cheerful smile. "In the summer I turn them out upon the hills to grass, and when winter comes I kill and eat them!"

THE DESIRE TO BE SEEN.

J. Pierpont Morgan, looking up from his well-beloved solitaire in the saloon of the *Olympic,* asked a resident of Denver the news of Western politics.

"Well, sir, our most startling news," said the Denverite, smiling, "is that John Blank"—here he named a Colorado statesman—"has turned Baptist."

"Turned Baptist?" said Mr. Morgan.

"Yes, sir; turned Baptist."

"But to turn Baptist, don't you have to be totally immersed?"

"Yes, sir; that is correct."

Mr. Morgan shook his head grimly and his cold blue eyes twinkled as he said:

"Then I can't believe this report. Blank would never consent to disappear from the public view for that length of time."

The Nick Carter Weekly

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When it comes to detective stories worth while, the NICK CARTER WEEKLY contains the only ones that should be considered. They are not overdrawn tales of bloodshed. They rather show the workings of one of the finest minds ever conceived by a writer.

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